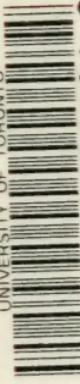


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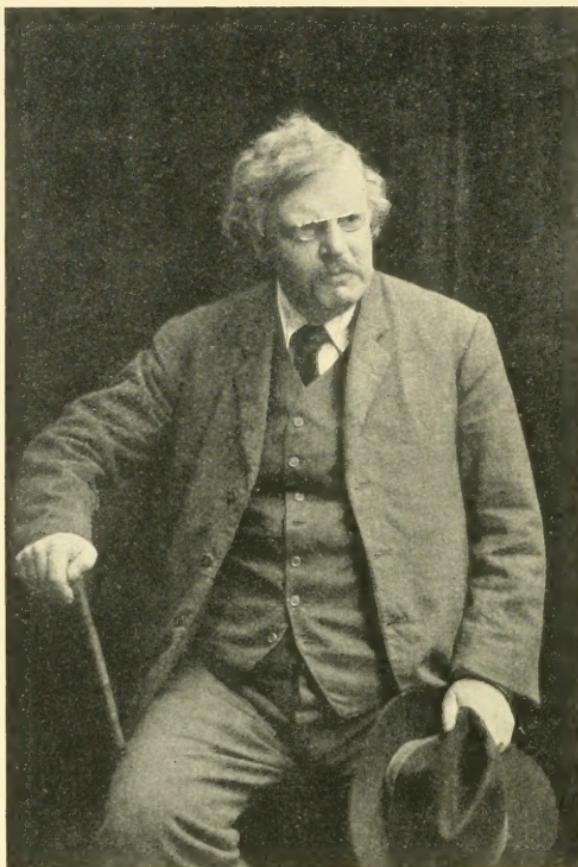












*G. K. CHESTERTON*

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# GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

By PATRICK BRAYBROOKE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
ARTHUR F. THORN

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## *Preface*

**I**T is certain that up to a point in the evolution of Self most people find life quite exciting and thrilling. But when middle age arrives, often prematurely, they forget the thrill and excitements; they become obsessed by certain other lesser things that are deficient in any kind of Cosmic Vitality. The thrill goes out of life: a light dies down and flickers fitfully; existence goes on at a low ebb—something has been lost. From this numbed condition is born much of the blind anguish of life.

It is one of the tragedies of human existence that the divine sense of wonder is eventually destroyed by inexcusable routine and more or less mechanical living. Mental abandon, the exercise of fancy and imagination, the function of creative thought—all these things are squeezed out of the consciousness of man until his primitive enjoyment of the mystical part of life is affected in a very serious way.

Nothing could be more useful, therefore, than to write a book about a man who has done more than any other living writer to stimulate and preserve the primitive sense of wonder and joy in human life. Gilbert Keith Chesterton has never lost mental contact with the cosmic simplicity of human existence. He knows, as well as anybody has ever known, that the life of man goes wrong simply because we are too lazy to be pleased with simple, fundamental things.

We grow up in our feverish, artificial civilization, believing that the real, satisfying things are complex and difficult to obtain. Our lives become unnaturally stressed and tormented by the pitiless and incessant struggle for social conditions which are, at best, second-rate and ultimately disappointing.

G. K. Chesterton would restore the primitive joys of wonder and childlike delight in simple things. His ideal is the *real*, not the merely impossible. Unlike most would-be

saviours of the race, he seeks not to merge a new humanity into a brand new glittering civilization. He would have us awaken once more to the ancient mysteries and eternal truths. He would have us turn back in order to progress.

Science makes us proud, but it does not make us happy. Efficiency makes us slaves—we have forgotten the truth about freedom. Success is our narcotic deity, and weans more men into despair than failure ; for, as G. K. C. has said, ‘ Nothing fails like Success.’ We have yet to rediscover the spiritual health that comes with a clear recognition of the part that life cannot be great until it is lived madly and wildly. We have to learn all over again that grass really is green, and the sky, at times, very blue indeed.

ARTHUR F. THORN

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## *Author's Note*

**T**HIS book is the outcome of many and repeated requests to the author to write it. While realizing the difficulties involved, he feels that the opportunities he has enjoyed give him at least some qualifications for the task, for not only is he a kinsman of Mr. Chesterton, but also has spent much time in his company.

The book aims to be a popular study of the Writer and the Man. It is dedicated to lovers of the works of G. K. C. and to the wider public who wish to know about one of the most brilliant minds of the day.

PATRICK BRAYBROOKE.

46 *Russell Square, W.C.1*  
1922.

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# *Chapter One*

## THE ESSAYIST

IT is extremely difficult in the somewhat limited space of a chapter to give the full attention that should be given to such a brilliant and original essayist (which is not always an *ipso facto* of brilliant essayists) as Chesterton. Essayists are of all men extremely elastic. Occasionally they are dull and prosy, very often they are obscure, quite often they are wearisome. The only criticism which applies adversely to Chesterton as an essayist is that he is very often—and I rather fear he likes being so—obscure. He is brilliant in an original manner, he is original in a brilliant way; scarcely any thought of his is not expressed in paradox. What is orthodox to him is heresy to other people; what is heresy to him is orthodox to other people; and the surprising fact is that he is usually right when he is orthodox, and equally right when he is heretical. An essayist naturally has points of view which he expresses in a different way to a novelist. A novelist, if he adheres to what a novel should be—that is, I think, a simple tale—does not necessarily have a particular point of view when he starts his book. An essayist, on the other hand, starts with an idea and clothes it. Of course, Chesterton is not an essayist in the really accepted manner of an essayist. He is really more a brilliant exponent of an original point of view. In other words, he essays to knock down opinions held by other essayists, whether writers or politicians. It would be manifestly absurd to praise Chesterton as being equal to Hazlitt, or condemn him as being inferior to J. S. Mill. Comparisons are usually odious, which is precisely the reason so much use is made of them. In this case any comparison is

not only odious; it is worse, it is merely futile, for the very simple fact that there has been no essayist ever quite like Chesterton, which is a compliment to him, because it proves what every one who knows is assured, that he is unique.

There are, of course, as is to be expected, people who do not like his essays. The reason is not far to seek, as in everything else people set up for themselves standards which they do not like to see set aside. Consequently people who had read Lamb, Hazlitt, Hume, and E. V. Lucas astutely thought that no essayist could be such who did not adhere to the style of one of these four. Therefore they were a little alarmed and upset when there descended upon them a strange genius who not only upset all the rules of essay writing, but was at the same time acclaimed by all sections of the Press as one of the finest essayists of the day.

With the advent of Chesterton the essay received a shock. It had to realize that it was a larger and wider thing than it had been before. As it had been almost insular, so it became international; as it had been almost theological in its orthodoxy, so it became in its catholicity well-nigh heretical. Which is the best possible definition of a heresy? It is the expanding of orthodoxy or the lessening of it. Thus Chesterton was a pioneer. He gave to the essay a new impetus—almost, we might say, a 'sketch' form; it dealt with subjects not so much in a dissertation as in a dissection. Having dissected one way so that we are quite sure no other method would do, he calmly dissects again in the opposite manner, leaving us gasping, and finding that there really are two ways of looking at every question—a thing we never realize till we think about it. I have in this chapter taken five of Chesterton's most characteristic books of essays, displaying the enormous depth of his intellect, the vast range of subject, the unique use of paradox. Of these five books I have again taken rather necessarily at random subjects depicting the above Chestertonian attributes, with an attempt to give some idea of what it really means when we say that he is an essayist.

That Chesterton's book of essays, entitled 'Heretics,' should have an introductory and a concluding chapter on the importance of orthodoxy is exactly what we should expect to find. There is a great deal of what is undeniably true in this book; there is also, I venture to think, a good deal that is undeniably untrue. I do not think it is unfair to say that in some respects Chesterton allows his cleverness to lead him to certain errors of judgment, and a certain levity in dealing with matters that are to a number of people so sacred that to reinterpret them is almost to blaspheme.

I am thinking of the chapter in this book that is a reply to Mr. McCabe, an ex-Roman Catholic, who, being a keen logician, is now a rationalist. He accuses Chesterton of joking with the things *de profundis*.

Certain clergymen have also taken exception to Chesterton's writings on the ground of this supposed levity. It is merely that he sees that the Bible has humour, because it has said that 'God laughed and winked.' I do not think he intends to offend, but for many people any idea of humour in the Bible is repugnant, and this view is not confined to clergymen.

In an absolutely charming chapter Chesterton writes of the literature of the servant girl, which is really the literature of Park Lane. It is the literature of Park Lane, for the very obvious reason that it is probably never read there; but the literature is about Park Lane, and is read by those who may live as near it as Balham or Surbiton. What he contends, and rightly, is that the general reader likes to hear about an environment outside his own. It is inherent in us that we always really want to be somewhere else; which is fortunate, as it makes it certain that the world will never come to an end through a universal contentment. It has been said that contentment is the essence of perfection. It is equally true that the essence of perfection is discontent, a striving for something else. This, I think, Chesterton feels when he says of the penny novelette that it is the literature

to 'teach a man to govern empires or look over the map of mankind.'

Rudyard Kipling finds a warm spot in Chesterton's heart, but he is a little too militaristic, which is exactly what he is not. Kipling loves soldiers, which is no real reason why he should be disliked as a militarist. Many a servant girl loves a score of soldiers, she may even write odes to her pet sergeant, but she is not necessarily a militarist. Rudyard Kipling likes soldiers and writes of them. He does not, as Chesterton lays to his charge, 'worship militarism.' He accuses Kipling of a want of patriotism, which is about as absurd as accusing Chesterton of a love of politics. But when he says that Kipling only knows England as a place, he is on safe ground, because England is something that is not bound by the confines of space.

Not being exactly a champion of Kipling, Chesterton turns to a different kind of man, George Moore, and has nothing to say for him beyond that he writes endless personal confessions, which most people do if there are those who will read them. But not only this, poor George Moore 'doesn't understand the Roman Catholic Church, he doesn't understand Thackeray, he misunderstands Stevenson, he has no understanding of Christianity.' It is, in fact, a hopeless case, but it is also possible that Chesterton has not troubled to understand George Moore.

Mr. Bernard Shaw is, so Chesterton contends, a really horrible eugenist, because he wants to get a super-man who, having more than two legs, will be a vastly superior person to a man. Chesterton loves men. He tells us why St. Peter was used to found the Church upon. It was because he 'was a shuffler, a coward, and a snob—in a word, a man.' Even the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Councils of Trent have failed to find a better reason for the founding of the Church. It is a defence of the fallibility of the Church, the practical nature of that Body, an organization founded by a Man who had Divine powers in a unique way and was God.

Presumably, then, the mistake of Shaw is that instead of trying to improve man he wishes to invent a kind of demi-god.

Chesterton has a great deal to say for Christmas; in fact, he has no sympathy for those superior beings who find Christmas out of date. Even Swinburne and Shelley have attacked Christianity in the grounds of its melancholy, showing a lamentable forgetfulness that this religion was born at a time that had always been a season of joy. Chesterton is annoyed with them, and is sure that Swinburne did not hang up his socks on Christmas Eve, nor did Shelley. I wonder whether Chesterton hangs up his socks on the eve of Christmas?

‘Heretics’ is a book that deals with a great number of subjects universal in their scope. The writing is at times too paradoxical, leading to obscurity of thought. There are splendid passages in this book, which is, when all is said, brilliantly original, even if at times a little puzzling.

‘Orthodoxy’ is, I think, one of the most important of Chesterton’s books. The lasting importance of a book depends not so much on its literary qualities or on its popularity, but rather on the theme handled.

There are really two central themes handled in this book. One is of Fairyland, the other is of the defence of Christianity; not that it is either true or false, but that it is rational, or the most shuffle-headed nonsense ever set to delude the human race. The method of apology that Chesterton takes is one that would cause the average theological student to turn white with fear.

The theological colleges, excellent as they are in endeavouring to train efficient laymen into equally efficient priests, usually assume that the best way to know about Christianity is to study Christian books. It is the worst way, because these books are naturally biased in favour of it. It is better to study any religion by seeing what the attackers have to say against it. Then a personal judgment can be formed.

This is, I feel, the method that Chesterton adopts in his deep and original treatise, 'Orthodoxy,' which is more than an essay and less than a theological work.

The Chestertonian contention is that philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche have embarked on the suicide of thought, and that a later disciple to this self-destruction is Bernard Shaw.

In the same way these pseudo philosophers have attacked the Christian religion, 'tearing the soul of Christ into silly strips labelled altruism and egoism. They are alike puzzled by His insane magnificence and His insane meekness.'

As I have said, the method to realize the worth of Christianity is to read all the attacks on it. This is what Chesterton does. In doing so he discovers that these attacks are the one thing that demonstrate the strength of Christianity. Because the attackers reject it upon reasons that are contradictory to each other. Thus some complain that it is a gloomy religion; others go to the opposite extreme and accuse it of pointing to a state of perpetual chocolate cream; yet again it is attacked on grounds of effeminancy, it is upbraided as being fond of a sickly sentimentalism.

Thus it is attacked on opposite grounds at once. It is condemned for being pessimistic, it is blamed for being optimistic. From this position Chesterton deduces that it is the only rational religion, because it steers between the Scylla of pessimism and avoids the Charybdis of a facile optimism. Regarding presumably the early Church she has also kept from extremes. She has ignored the easy path of heresy, she has adhered to the adventurous road of orthodoxy. She has avoided the Arian materialism by dropping a Greek Iota; she has not succumbed to Eastern influences, which would have made her forget she was the Church on earth as well as in heaven. With tremendous commonsense she has remained rational and chosen the middle course, which was one of the cardinal virtues of the ancient Greek philosophers.

The Christian religion is, then, rational because attacked

along irrational grounds; the Church is also reasonable because she has not been swayed by the attraction of heresy nor listened to the glib fallacies of those who always want to make her something more or something less.

The other and lesser contention of the book is the wisdom of the land of the Fairies. This is, Chesterton feels, the land where is found the philosophy of the nursery that is expressed in fairy tales—tales that every grown-up should read at Christmas.

Fairyland is for Chesterton the sunny land of common-sense. It is more, it is a place that has a very definite religion; it is, in fact, really the child's land of Christ. Take the lesson of Cinderella, says Chesterton; it is really the teaching of the Prayer Book that the humble shall be exalted, because humility is worthy of exaltation.

Or the Sleeping Beauty. Is it not the significance of how love can bridge time? The prince would have been there to wake the princess had she slept a thousand instead of a hundred years.

Yet again the land of the Fairies is the abode of reason. If Jack is the son of a miller, then a miller is the father of Jack. It is no good in Fairyland trying to prove that two and two do not make four, but it is quite possible to imagine that the witch really did turn the unlucky prince into a pig. After all, such a procedure is not a monopoly of the fairies. Lesser persons than princes have been turned into pigs, not by the wand of a witch, but by the wand of good or bad fortune.

‘Orthodoxy’ is probably the sanest book that Chesterton has ever written. It is, I venture to think, the work that will gain for him immortality. It is a book on the greatest of themes, the reasonableness of the Christian religion. There have been many books written to attack the Christian religion, equally many to defend it, but Chesterton has

made his apology for the religion on original grounds—the contradictions of the detractors of it. ‘Orthodoxy’ goes alone with Christ into the mountain, and the eager multitudes receive the real philosophy of Chesterton.

The child who has eaten too much jam and feels that too much of a good thing is a truism is rather like the philosopher who, having studied everything, comes to the sad conviction that there is something wrong with the world. The child finds that large quantities of jam are a delusion; the philosopher discovers that the world is even more wrong than he thought it was.

Sitting in his study, Chesterton, looking out on the garden which is the world, discovers that there is something wrong with it, and it is caused by the machinations of the 1,500 odd millions of people who, like ants, crawl about its surface. ‘What’s wrong with the World?’ is the result, and a very entertaining book it is. Like many other sociological treatises it leaves us still convinced that the world is wrong, because we don’t know what we really want.

The pessimist is convinced that the world is a bad place, the optimist is sure that it can be good. That is the point of the book. Chesterton has his own ideas of what is wrong, and he says so with astonishing paradox.

When this book was written, Feminism was demanding votes, and, not getting them at once, became naughty, and tied itself to the House of Commons or pushed policemen over. Chesterton devotes a large section of this book to demanding what is the mistake of Feminism.

‘The Feminists probably agree that womanhood is under shameful tyranny in the shops and mills. I want to destroy this tyranny. They (the Feminists) want to destroy womanhood.’ They do this by attempting to drive women into the world and turn them away from the home. This is what is wrong with the woman’s world: they have it that the home is narrow, that the world is wide. The converse

is the truth: woman is the star of the home. It is a pity if she has to make chains—significant word—at Cradley Heath.

Education is not for Chesterton an unqualified success; there is a mistake about it somewhere. In fact, there is ‘no such thing as education.’ Education is not an object, it is a ‘transmission’ or an ‘inheritance.’ It means that a certain standard of conduct is passed on from generation to generation. The keynote of education for Chesterton is undoubtedly dogma, and dogma is certainly the result of a narrowing tendency.

At this present time there is a controversy about the use of our public schools. Whenever a harassed editor in Fleet Street cannot think what to put in those two spare columns, he works up a ‘stunt’ on the use or otherwise of the public schools. This is always exciting, as the public schools hardly ever see the controversy, being blissfully immersed in the military strategy of Hannibal or the political intrigues of the Cæsars. Thus the controversy is conducted by those who generally think that commerce is superior to Greek, money-grubbing to good manners.

Even Chesterton must say something about these schools that are the backbone of England. Unfortunately he thinks that they are weakening the country, that the headmasters ‘are teaching only the narrowest of manners.’ But the public schools ‘manufacture gentlemen; they are factories for the making of aristocrats.’ If he is right, the more of these schools there are the better it is for the country.

It is well that he is not averse to Greek. In these days the classics are looked upon as waste of time. Political economy and profiteering are more useful. As he says, a man of the type of Carnegie would die in a Greek city. I am not sure whether this is not unfair. The real use of Greek is that it teaches culture. There is use in Plato’s philosophy; it is quite as useful as the knowledge acquired that results in peers made, not born. I don’t think Chesterton understands the

public schools at all well; they are both bad and good, but at least they are very English.

He hasn't a great deal to say for Imperialism. Imperialism is a very difficult ethic; it is not easy to say whether it is a selfish or an unselfish policy.

Thus we may quite conceivably pat ourselves on the back and say that, as English rule is good for natives, it is only right that we should keep India; but we might find that an equally good and more popular reason for doing so would be to prevent any one else having her. Thus our Imperial policy is a little selfish and a little unselfish.

For Chesterton, Imperialism is something that is both weak and perilous. It is really, he contends, a false idealism which tends to try and make people locally discontented, contented with pseudo visions of distant realms where the cities are of gold, where blue skies are never hidden by yellow fog. But is it a false idealism? If it is, it is that conception which has made men leave their homes in England to build up the Imperial Empire which is the daughter of the Great Imperial Island. The vision may not be always useful, but Imperialism has done much to make England and Empire synonymous.

Business is, according to Chesterton, a nasty thing that will not wait. It hates leisure, it has no use for brotherhood, it is one of the things that is wrong in the world—not, of course, that business is wrong in itself, but the method. Thus he disagrees that if a soap factory cannot be run on brotherhood lines the brotherhood must be scrapped. He would have the converse to be better.

He contends that it is better to be without soap than without society. As a matter of fact, society without soap would be an abomination. Society without any brotherhood would soon cease to be a society at all. Utopia is a little soap, a little society, with a flavouring of brotherhood in each.

Another and obviously good reason that the world is wrong is that it is only half finished. This is a matter for

extreme optimism; it is the one great thing that makes it certain that the world will be found all right if it comes to an end. That is, if it delays long enough for the Irish question to be settled.

This is what Chesterton contends in this fine book, that reforms are not reforms at all, rather the same things dressed up in other clothes. Values are set up on false standards. Women in trying to become emancipated are likely to become slaves; the fear of the past is given over to a too delicate introspection of the probable vices and virtues of generations not yet born.

Imperialism is liable to a false idealism, drawing men from Seven Dials to find Utopia in Brixton. The public schools are weakening the country in some respects. Education is not education at all; in fact, we really must start the wrong world over again. I don't quite see where Chesterton proposes we are to start, or exactly how, whether backwards or forwards. Perhaps, as in 'Orthodoxy,' the middle course is the happy and safe one.

'Tremendous Trifles' is a Chestertonian philosophy of the importance and interest of small things. It is a remarkable thing that we never see the things that we daily gaze upon. Chesterton finds scope for all kinds of subjects in this book, from a 'Piece of Chalk' to 'A Dragon's Grandmother.' Provided we believe in dragons, there is good reason to suppose that they have grandmothers. It is not so easy to write a good essay on the subject. Chesterton does so with great skill, and it makes it quite certain to be so intellectual as to hate fairies is a piteous condition.

What he brings out in this particular essay is that what modern intellectualism has done is to make 'the hero extraordinary, the tale ordinary,' whereas the fairy tale makes 'the hero ordinary, the tale extraordinary.'

In this book of short essays it is only possible to take a few, but 'care has been taken to attempt to show the enormous

versatility of Chesterton's mind. It has been said quite wrongly that Chesterton cannot describe pathos. This is certainly untrue. He can so admirably describe humour that he cannot help knowing the pathetic, which is often so akin to humour. I am not sure that this ability to describe the melancholy is not to be seen in one of these essays that narrates how he travelled in a train in which there was a dead man whose end he never knew.

Perhaps there is nothing more interesting than turning out one's pockets—all sorts of long forgotten mementoes cause a lump in the throat or a gleam in the eye; but it is very annoying, on arriving at a station where tickets are collected, to find everything that relates to your past twenty years of life and be unable to find the ticket that makes you a legitimate rider on the iron way. This is what Chesterton describes in a delightful essay.

One day, so Chesterton tells us in the 'Riddle of the Ivy,' he happened to be leaving Battersea, and being asked where he was going, calmly replied to 'Battersea.' Which is really to say that we find our way to Brixton more eagerly by way of Singapore than by way of Kennington. In a few words, it is what we mean when we say, as every traveller says at times, 'Home, sweet home.' I fancy this is what Mr. Chesterton means. It is a beautiful thought—a fine love of the home, a strange understanding of the wish of the traveller who once more wishes to see the old cottage before he journeys 'across the Bar.'

The sight of chained convicts being taken to a prison causes Chesterton to essay on the 'filthy torture' of our prisons, the whole system of which is a 'relic of sin.' Perhaps he is right! But is it that the prisons are wrong, or is it that society makes criminals? After all, convicts are chained that they shall not endure a worse penalty for attempted escape. At present prisons are as necessary to the State as milk is to a baby; the thing against them is that they turn criminal men into criminal devils.

At his home in Beaconsfield, Chesterton has a wonderful toy theatre. He writes in this book a sketch about it. This toy theatre has a certain philosophy. 'It can produce large events in a small space; it could represent the earthquake in Jamaica or the Day of Judgment.' We must take Chesterton's word for it. I am not convinced that the toy theatre of Chesterton has added to philosophy; I don't think it has made any remarkable contribution to thought, nor is it, as he claims, more interesting and better than a West-end theatre; but I do believe that in having amused a few hundred children it has a place in the Book of Life—perhaps near the name of Santa Claus.

While it is true that 'Tremendous Trifles' is not nearly as important as some of the Chesterton books, it is true to say that it is a remarkably pleasant book about small things that are really tremendous when we come to study them.

'The Defendant' is, as the title suggests, a defence of all kinds of things that are usually attacked by other people.

It takes a brave man to defend 'penny dreadfuls.' Chesterton assumes this rôle. He defends them on their remarkable powers of imagination. One has only to study Sexton Blake to discover the intricate psychology of that wondrous personality who can solve the foulest murder or unravel stories that the divorce courts would quail before.

There is something to be said for the skeleton so long as he doesn't come out of his cupboard. Chesterton defends skeletons. 'The truth is that man's horror of the skeleton is not horror of death at all; it is that the skeleton reminds him that his appearance is shamelessly grotesque.' But he sees no objection to this at all. After all, he says, the frog and the hippopotamus are happy. Why, then, should man dislike it that his anatomy without flesh is inelegant?

It is to be expected that Chesterton would write a defence of baby worship, because they are so 'very serious and in consequence very happy.' 'The humorous look of children is

perhaps the most endearing of all the bonds that hold the Cosmos together.' Probably we are all agreed that the defence of baby worship is a desirable thing; possibly it is the only point upon which there is universal agreement with Chesterton.

'The Defendant' is a series of papers that are light, but conceal a depth of thought behind them. 'They demonstrate that there is something to be said for everything which may be a slight solution of the eternal problem that theological professors are paid to try and discover, the problem of evil. It may be that there is really no such thing, but it would be disastrous to these professors to discover this, so the dear old problem goes on from year to year.

As an essayist, Chesterton is never dull: the philosophy contained in his essays is not prosy. The only fault is that he is at times so clever that it is a little difficult to know what he means. But this really does not matter, as a shrewd critic of one of his books made it public through the Press that Chesterton did not know himself what he meant. But I wonder if he did really know?

## *Chapter Two*

### DICKENS

**I**F there is fault to be found in Chesterton's masterly study of Charles Dickens it lies in the fact that in parts of the book the meaning is not always clear, or, rather, it is not always so at a first reading. Whether this may be justly termed a fault depends largely upon what the reader of a critical study demands.

If he desires that he shall read Chesterton superficially and yet understand, he will be doomed to disappointment. Perhaps of all writers Chesterton must be read with the head between the hands, with a fierce determination that the meaning veiled in brilliant paradox shall be sought out.

He is not only a keen critic, he is also a deliberate commentator. The difference is fundamental. The commentator builds upon the foundation the critic has erected; he does not merely state what he thinks about a book or character, rather he explains the criticism already made.

This is the method adopted with regard to Dickens. Chesterton has written a commentary on the soul of Dickens, he has not in any strict sense written a biography; this was not necessary; the difficulty of Dickens lies in the interpretation of his work; his life, though having a great influence on his writings, has been written so often that Chesterton has refrained from building on 'another's foundation.' In a word, it is an intensely original work, far more than our critic's companion book on Browning.

As was Browning born to a world in the throes of the aftermath of the French Revolution, so was Dickens. Chesterton lays great stress on the youth of Dickens; it is only

right that he should do this; the early life of Dickens was probably responsible for the wonderful genius of his art. The blacking factory that nearly killed the physical Dickens gave birth to the literary Dickens. Dickens was, in fact, born at the psychological moment, which is not to say that we are born at the unpsychological moment, but that Dickens was born at a time that allowed his natural powers to be used to the best advantage.

Chesterton feels this strongly. ‘The background of the Dickens era was just that background that was eminently suitable to him’; it was a background that needed a Dickens as much as the pagan world, with all its Greek philosophies, had needed a Christ.

He begins his study of Dickens with a keen survey of the Dickens period ‘It was,’ he says, ‘a world that encouraged anybody to anything. And in England and literature its living expression was Dickens. It is useless for us to attempt to imagine Dickens and his life unless we are able to imagine his confidence in common men.’

It is this supreme confidence in common men that was the keynote to the wonderful power of Dickens in making characters from those who were in a world sense undistinguished. On this position Chesterton lays great stress. It was this, he thinks, that made him an optimist. It was the same position that made Browning an optimist. It is the disbelief in the Divine image in Man that makes the cynic and the pessimist.

Swift hated men because they were capable of better things but would not realize it. Dickens knew men were kings, though ordinary men; the result was that he loved humanity. It is a queer point of psychology that with the same wish two such minds as Swift and Dickens came to the extremes of the emotions of love and hate.

In some ways Dickens was more than a maker of books, he was a maker of worlds; he tried to make ‘not only a book but a cosmos.’ This may be a curious and obscure kind of

clericalism that popularly expresses itself as an effort to run with the hare and follow with the hounds, but is really an heroic attempt to see both sides of the question, and is not a cheap pandering after popularity.

Many critics have disliked Dickens because of this tendency of universalism, a tendency liable to intrude on minds of a giant intellect and a ready sympathy. Chesterton does not think that Dickens was right in this attitude of universalism, and says so with, I think, a certain amount of cheap disdain. 'He was inclined to be a literary Whiteley, a universal provider.' Really Dickens wanted to have a say about everything, in which he is strangely like Chesterton.

The result of this was a result that meant the greatest value: it meant and was 'David Copperfield.' The book was for Chesterton a classic, and it was so because it was an autobiography. It is in this work that Dickens makes his defence of the rather exaggerated situations in some of his books, for in this book Dickens proves that his greatest romance is based on the experiences of his own life. 'David Copperfield is the great answer of a romancer to the realists. David says in effect, "What! you say that the Dickens tales are too purple really to have happened. Why, this is what happened to me, and it seemed the most purple of all. You say that the Dickens heroes are too handsome and triumphant! Why, no prince or paladin in Ariosto was ever so handsome and triumphant as the head boy seemed to me walking before me in the sun. You say the Dickens villains are too black. Why, there was no ink in the Devil's ink-stand black enough for my own stepfather when I had to live in the same house with him."

This is the point that Chesterton brings out so well. The Dickens characters are not overdrawn because, though they move between book covers, their originals have moved on the face of the earth; they have moved with Dickens and he has made them his own. His brilliant apology for this alleged 'overdrawing' is one of the most effective replies ever penned

to superior Dickens detractors. It is effective because it is true; it is true because it is obvious that Dickens created that which lay hidden in his own mind, the misery of his factory days.

It is, I think, with this view in mind that Chesterton pays so much attention to that period of Dickens' life which he spent in the blacking factory, with its crude noise, its blatant vulgarity, its vile language that left the small boy Dickens' sick, but with a sickness that discovered his literary genius. The factory was the germ that made the great writer. Chesterton is a true critic of Dickens because he has this somewhat singular insight of seeing the importance of the early miseries of Dickens' life with regard to their influence on his literary output and his queerly favoured delineation of common folks, the sort of people we always meet but hardly ever talk about because we are foolish enough to think them ordinary.

It is from the account of the early life of Dickens that Chesterton gently leads us to the birth of the immortal Mr. Pickwick, that supreme Englishman who is a byword amongst even those who scarcely know Dickens. The birth pangs of the advent of Pickwick was a sharp quarrel 'that did no good to Dickens, and was one of those which occurred far too frequently in his life.'

Without any hesitation for Chesterton, 'Pickwick Papers' is Dickens' finest achievement, which is a pleasant enough problem if we happen to remember that he also wrote 'David Copperfield.' Possibly it is really unfair to compare them. 'Pickwick Papers' is not in the strict sense a novel; 'David Copperfield' is a novel even if it is an autobiography. At any rate Pickwick was a fairy, and as fairies are pretty elastic he probably was in that category of beings, but he was even more a royal fairy, none other than the 'fairy prince.'

In Pickwick, Dickens made a great discovery, which was that he could write ordinary stuff like the 'Sketches by

'Boz,' and also could produce Mr. Pickwick and write 'David Copperfield,' which was to say that Dickens discovered he had a good chance of being the Shakespeare of literature.

'It is in "Pickwick Papers" that Dickens became a mythologist rather than a novelist; he dealt with men who were gods.' That is, no doubt, that they became household gods; in other words, as familiar as the characters of Shakespeare.

There is one tremendous outstanding characteristic of Dickens which Chesterton brings out with considerable force. It is that above all things Dickens created characters. It is almost as if the setting of his books were on a stage where the environment changes but the essentials of the characters remain unchanged.

The story is almost subordinated to the drawing of the principal character; it is almost a modern idea of the psycho-analytical kind of novel that our young novelists love to draw. But still there is the great difference that the characters of Dickens pursue their own way regardless of the trend of events round them.

Naturally the modern novel is inferior to some of Dickens' works, but they do not deserve the hard things Chesterton says about them. Thus he remarks in passing that the modern novel is 'devoted to the bewilderment of a weak young clerk who cannot decide which woman he wants to marry or which new religion he believes in; we still give this knock-kneed cad the name of hero.'

This is, I think, unfair. The modern novel is very often still a good healthy love tale; the hero is more often than not a gentleman who has not the brains to be a cad; his trouble about marriage is that he wants to marry the right woman to their mutual well being; he is neither a cad nor a hero, but an ordinary Englishman whom we need not walk half a mile to see; he usually marries a girl who can be seen in any suburb or at any church bazaar. I have dwelt on this at some

length, as Chesterton has a tendency to despise modern novelists while being one himself.

At this period, when 'Pickwick' had once and for all brought fame to Dickens, it will be interesting to see why Dickens attained the enormous popularity he did. He was, our critic thinks, a 'great event not only in literature but also in history.'

He considers that Dickens was popular in a sense that we of the twentieth century cannot understand. In fact, he goes so far as to say that there are no really popular authors to-day.

This is probably not entirely true. When we say an author is popular we do not mean that necessarily, as Chesterton seems to suggest, he is a 'best seller'; rather we call him popular in the sense that a large number of people find pleasure in reading him, even if the subject is not a pleasant one. Dickens was popular in a different way: he was read by a public who wished his story might never end. They not only loved his books, they loved his characters even more. No matter that there might be five sub-stories running alongside of the main one, the central character retained the public affection. His characters were known outside their particular stories, and not only that, this was by no means confined to the principal ones.

They were known, as Chesterton points out, as Sherlock Holmes is known to-day. But even so there is again a difference. People do not speak of the minor characters of Conan Doyle's tales as they do, for instance, of Smike.

It is now convenient to turn to the Christmas literature of Dickens. I am convinced that Chesterton has very badly misconstrued the character of Scrooge, that delightful person whose one virtue was consistency.

Above everything, Scrooge was consistent; he hated Christmas as we hate anything that does not agree with our temperament. Merry Christmas was nonsense to him

because he did not know how to be merry. He was a cold, cynical bachelor, and at that, so far, was perfectly within the law, moral and legal.

But Chesterton, by rather an unfortunate attempt to be too original, has turned him into a filthy hypocrite who needed no appearances of spirits whatever; for he says of Scrooge, 'He is only a crusty old bachelor, and had, I strongly suspect, given away turkeys secretly all his life.'

When Chesterton says that Scrooge gave away turkeys secretly all his life it is merely saying that the whole attitude of Scrooge to life was a silly and unmeaning pose, which makes him ridiculous, and robs the 'Christmas Carol' of all its real worth, that of the miraculous conversion of Scrooge.

But, then, the actual story does not mean much for Chesterton: 'the repentance of Scrooge is highly improbable.' If it is true that Scrooge really did give away turkeys secretly, then it is quite obvious that Scrooge never did repent; he was past it. But I fancy that Chesterton has erred badly here; he has attempted without success to put a secret meaning into a simple and beautiful story.

'Chimes' is, for Chesterton, an attack on cant. It was a story written by Dickens to protest against all he hated in the nature of oppression. Dickens hated the vulgar cant that only helps to bring self-advertisement: the ethic that the poor must listen to the rich, not because the rich are the best law-givers, but because society is at present so constituted that no other method can be adopted.

Dickens loved the attitude the poor always take to Christmas; it is that attitude which is the proof that at its bedrock humanity is extremely lovable. Chesterton is entirely in agreement with Dickens on this matter. 'There is nothing,' he says, 'upon which the poor are more criticized than on the point of spending large sums on small feasts; there is nothing in which they are more right.'

Dickens did not in any way forget that the real spirit of Christmas is to be found in the cheery group round the

blazing fire. 'The Cricket on the Hearth' is a pleasant tale about all that we associate with Christmas, that very thing that has made Hearth and Christmas synonymous; yet Chesterton considers this one of the weakest of the Dickens' stories, which is a surprising criticism for a writer who really loves Christmas as he does.

In a later period of Dickens, Chesterton informs us of his brief entry into the complex and exciting world that has its headquarters in Fleet Street. For a short period Dickens occupied the editorship of the *Daily News*, but the environment was not a very congenial one. Dickens was unsettled with that strange restlessness that seizes all literary men at some time or other. This was the time that saw the publication of 'Dombey and Son.' Chesterton thinks that the essential genius found its most perfect expression in this work though the treatment is grotesque. This book is almost, so our critic thinks, 'a theological one: it attempts to distinguish between the rough pagan devotion of the father and the gentler Christian affection of the mother.'

The grotesque manner of treatment of this work was as natural as the employment of the grotesque by Browning. Dickens must work in his own way, in the manner that suited his inmost soul; he could not be made to write to order. In a brilliant paradox Chesterton says of 'Dombey and Son': the 'story of Florence Dombey is incredible, although it is true,' which is what many people feel about Christianity. 'Dombey and Son' was the outlet for that curious psychology of Dickens which could get the best out of a pathetic incident by approaching it from a grotesque angle. It came, as Chesterton points out in his own inimitable way, 'into the inner chamber by coming down the chimney.' Which demonstrates the ever nearness of pathos to humour, of the absurd to the pathetic.

It will not be out of place to refer at this time to some of the defects with which people have charged Dickens. Chesterton

does not agree with the critics on these points, but admits that these charges have been levelled against Dickens. It will be advisable to take one or two examples of these alleged flaws.

There is that most popular thing of which Dickens is accused, that of exaggeration. Many people are quite incredulous that there could ever have existed such a character as Little Nell. Chesterton, however, thinks that Dickens did know a girl of this nature, and that Little Nell was based on her. Little Nell is not really more improbable than 'Eric,' the famous hero of Dean Farrar, and he was certainly based on a living boy.

People who live in these enlightened days are piously shocked at the amount of drinking described by Dickens. Well-bred and garrulous ladies have shuddered at the scenes described, and have declared that Dickens was at least fond of the Bacchanalian element. So he was, but the reason was not that he loved hard drinking, but that, as our critic brings out, drinking was the symbol of hospitality as roast beef is the symbol of a Sunday in a thousand English rectories. As Dickens described the social life of England he could not leave out its most characteristic feature and shudder in pious horror that the red wine dyed old England a merry crimson.

It would be no doubt an exaggeration to call Dickens a socialist. What he saw was that there was a mass of beings that was called humanity, that the two ends of the political pole were indifferent to this mass. The party to which a man gave his allegiance did not matter as long as that party worked for man's ultimate good. Chesterton is quite sure that Dickens was not a socialist; he was not the kind that ranted at street corners and dined in secret at the Ritz, nor was he of the kind who said all men are equal but I am a little better. He was a socialist in the sense that he hated oppression of any kind.

'Hard Times' strikes a note that is a little short of being harsh. The reason that Dickens may have exaggerated

Bounderby is that he really disliked him. The Dickensian characters undoubtedly suffered from their delineator's likes and dislikes.

About this time Dickens wrote a book that was unique for him; it was a book that dealt with the French Revolution, and was called 'The Tale of Two Cities.' Chesterton does not think that Dickens really understood this gigantic upheaval; in fact, he says his attitude to it was quite a mistaken one. Even, thinks our critic, Carlyle didn't know what it meant. Both see it as a bloody riot, both are mistaken. The reason that Carlyle and Dickens didn't know all about it was that they had the good fortune to be Englishmen; a very good supposition that Chesterton has still something to learn of that Revolution.

After all, the main point of 'The Tale of Two Cities' is the exquisite pathos of it. Whether its attitude to the French Revolution is absolutely accurate does not matter very much for the reader who is not a keen historical student.

With 'Hard Times' and 'A Tale of Two Cities' Dickens has struck a graver note. This is peculiarly emphasized in 'Great Expectations.' This story is 'characterized by a consistency and quietude of individuality which is rare in Dickens.' It is really a book with a moral—that life in the limelight is not always synonymous with getting the best out of it. Really, the hero behaves in a sneakish manner. Probably Dickens doesn't like him, and the writer is still on the stern side.

In 1864, so Chesterton tells us, Dickens was in a merrier mood, and published 'Our Mutual Friend,' a book that has, as our critic says, 'a thoroughly human hero and a thoroughly human villain.' This work is 'a satire dealing with the whims and pleasures of the leisured class.' But this is by no means a monopoly of the so-called idle rich: the hard-working middle and poorer classes have whims and pleasures in a like manner, but have not so much opportunity in indulging in them.

As I have indicated, the story is not the principal part of the Dickens' literature; it is the drawing of characters to which he pays so much attention. It will not be out of place at this time to see what our critic has to say with regard to this tendency of Dickens. It is an essential of Dickens, and is therefore of vast import to any critique on him.

The essence of Dickens, for Chesterton, is that he makes kings out of common men: those folks who are the ordinary people of this strange, fascinating world, those who have no special claim to a place in the stars, those who, when they die, do not have two lines in any but a local paper, those who are common but are never commonplace.

There is a vast difference between the common and the commonplace, as Chesterton points out. Death is common to all, yet it is never commonplace; it is in its very essence a grand and noble thing, because it is a proof of our common humanity; it gives the lie that the Pope is of more importance than the dustman; it makes the busy editor equal to the newsboy shouting the papers under his office windows.

The common man is he who does not receive any special distinction: universities do not compete to do him honour, his name is but mentioned in a small circle. These are those of whom Dickens wrote. 'It is,' says Chesterton, 'in private life that we find the great characters. They are too great to get into the public world.' They are people who are natural—natural in a sense that the holders of high office never can be. Dickens could only write of natural people, so he wrote of common men: 'You will find him adrift as an impecunious commercial traveller like Micawber; you will find him but one of a batch of silly clerks like Swiveller; you will find him as an unsuccessful actor like Crumples; you will find him as an unsuccessful doctor like Sawyer; you will always find the rich and reeking personality where Dickens found it among the poor.'

Not only were the characters Dickens chose common men, they were also 'great fools,' because Chesterton will have us

believe that a man can be entirely great while he is entirely foolish. It is no doubt in the spiritual sense so admirably expressed in the Pauline Epistles, where 'foolish in the eyes of the world but wise before God' is a condition that is of merit.

'Mr. Toots is great because he is foolish.' He is great because he has a soul that glorifies his weak and foolish body, not that he is great because, *ipso facto*, he is foolish.

There is a great and permanent value in the writings of Dickens. I cannot do better than quote our critic: 'If we are to look for lessons, here at least are the last and deepest lessons of Dickens. It is in our own daily life that we are to look for the portents and the prodigies. This is the truth, not merely of the fixed figures of our life, the wife, the husband, the fool that fills the day. Every day we neglect Tootses and Swivellers, Guppys and Joblings, Simmerys and Flashers. This is the real gospel of Dickens, the inexhaustible opportunities offered by the liberty and variety of man. It is when we pass our own private gate and open our own secret door that we step into the land of the giants.'

It will now be convenient to consider the question of the attitude of our critic to the 'Mystery of Edwin Drood,' that tale that has produced one of those literary mysteries that are so dear to a number of folks of the kind who would be disappointed were the problem to be finally solved. 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' was cut short by the sudden death that fell upon Dickens on a warm June night some half century ago.

For Chesterton the book 'might have proved to be the most ambitious that Dickens ever planned.' It is non-Dickensian in the sense that its value depends entirely on a story. The workmanship is very fine. The book was purely and simply a detective story. 'Bleak House' was the nearest approach to its style, but the mystery there was easy to unravel. It was as though Dickens wished in 'Edwin Drood'

to make one last 'splendid and staggering' appearance before the curtain rang down, not to be rung up again until the last Easter morning.

'Yes,' says Chesterton, 'there were many other Dickenses, 'an industrious Dickens, a public spirited Dickens, but the last one (that is *Edwin Drood*) was the great one. The wild epitaph of Mrs. Sapsea, "Canst thou do likewise?" should be the serious epitaph of Dickens.'

It is more than fifty years since Dickens died. What is the future of Dickens likely to be? At least, Chesterton has no doubt of the permanent influence of Dickens; he is as sure of immortality as is Shakespeare. The kings of the earth die, yet their works remain; the princes pass on but are not entirely forgotten; writers write and in their turn sleep; but there is that to which in every age we inscribe the word Immortal. It is enough to say that Dickens is immortal because he is Dickens. There is a further reason, that he proved what all the world had been saying, that common humanity is a holy thing. To quote Chesterton: 'He did for the world what the world could not do for itself.' Dickens' creation was poetry—it dealt with the elementals; it is therefore permanent.

In final words he says, 'We shall not be further troubled with the little artists who found Dickens too sane for their sorrows and too clear for their delights. But we have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant; and the passage is a long, rambling English road, a twisting road such as Mr. Pickwick travelled.'

'But the road leads to eternity, because the inn is at the end of the road, and at that inn is a goodly company of common men who are immortal because Dickens made them. Here we shall meet Dickens and all his characters, and when we shall drink again it shall be from great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.'

What, then, is the essential part of Chesterton's study of

Charles Dickens? It is certainly not a biography; it is for all practical purposes a keen study of what Dickens was, what he wrote, why he wrote as he did, why he has a place in literature no one else has.

There are faults in the book—it would be a poor book if it had none. At times I think Chesterton allows his genius to overcome his critical judgment. Particularly is this so in his strange misconstruction of the character of Scrooge. But this merely demonstrates yet once more that Dickens, like Christ, is unique, because no one has ever completely understood him.

The book is a tribute by a great writer to a greater writer, by a great man to a great man, by a complex personality to a complex personality; above all it is a tribute by a lover of the things of the 'doorstep' to a writer who has made the doorstep and the street the road to heaven, because the beings who pass along have been made immortal.

When the critics of Dickens meet at the inn there will be none more worthy of a place close to the Master Writer than Chesterton.

## *Chapter Three*

### THACKERAY

**T**HREE are no doubt thousands of people who would be annoyed to be thought the reverse of well read who nevertheless know Thackeray only as a name. They know that he was a really great English novelist—they may even know that he lived as a contemporary of Dickens—but they do not know a line of any of his works.

In lesser manner Dickens is unknown to very many people of the present day who could tell you intelligently of every modern book that is produced. The reason is, I think, one that is not so generally thought of as might be expected.

It is often said that Thackeray and Dickens are out of date, that they have had their day, that this era of tube trains and other abominations cannot fall into the background of lumbering stage coaches.

This is, I think, a profound and grave error. It is an error because it presupposes that human interest changes with the advent of different means of transport: that Squeers is no longer of interest because he would now travel to Yorkshire by the Great Northern Railway and would have lunch in a luncheon car instead of inside a four-horse stage coach.

The fundamental reason that modern people do not read these great authors is that they are not encouraged to do so. The very best way to instil a love of Thackeray into the modern world is to make the modern world read just so much of him that its voracious appetite is sharpened to wish for more.

In an altogether admirable series of the masters of literature Thackeray finds a place, and treatment of him is left

to Chesterton, who writes a fine introductory 'Biography' and then takes picked passages from his writings. This is, I think, the most useful means possible of popularizing an author. It requires a good deal of pluck in these days to sit down and steadily pursue a way through a long book of Thackeray unless it has been proved, by the perusal of a selected passage, that riches in the book warrant the act of courage in beginning the work.

In this chapter it will be convenient to pay special attention to the introduction that is so ably contributed by Chesterton. It will only be possible to refer to the passages he has selected from Thackeray, and the reader must judge of the merit of the choosing. It is one of the hardest things possible to choose representative passages from a great writer. Shall he choose those that display the literary qualities of the writer, shall he choose those which depict his powers of drama, shall he select those which bring out the humour of the writer, shall he pick at random and let the passage stand or fall on its own merits? These are questions that must be faced in a work of the nature of Chesterton's Thackeray. What the method has been will, I hope, be clear at the end of this chapter.

It was Thackeray's expressed wish that there should be no biography written of him, a position that might indicate extreme modesty, colossal conceit, or distinct cowardice. Whatever the reason, it has not been entirely obeyed, and rightly. A man of the power of Thackeray cannot live without the world being in some way better; it is only good that those who never knew him in the flesh should at least know him in a book. It is not enough that, as Chesterton points out, he 'was of all novelists the most autobiographical,' which is not to say that he wrote unending personal confessions with a very large I, but rather that his books were drawn from the experiences of his life, a field that is productive of the richest literary worth.

Thackeray was born, we are told, in the year 1811, so that he was a year old when the world received two babies who

were like ten thousand other babies, except that they happened to be Browning and Dickens. It was the time when the world trembled, because that mighty soldier Napoleon stood with arms folded, waiting to strike, it knew not where. It was the time when military genius reached its height, a height that could be only brought low by one thing, and that was an English General with a long nose and a cocked hat.

Although Thackeray was born in Calcutta, he was as English as he could possibly be. But he did not forget his Eastern beginning. 'A certain vague cosmological quality was always mixed with his experience, and it was his favourite boast that he had seen men and cities like Ulysses.' Which is to say that he had not only seen the world, he had felt it; if he had not seen a one-eyed giant, he had at least seen a two-eyed Hindu.

His early life followed the ordinary life of a thousand other boys born of Anglo-Indian parents; that was, he went to school, where 'a girl broke his heart and a boy broke his nose,' and he discovered that the nose took longer to mend.

At Cambridge, Chesterton tells us, Thackeray found that it was a quite easy thing to sit down and play cards and lose £1,500 in an evening, a fact that very probably was more useful to him than twenty degrees. Trinity College was the Thackeray College: it has had no more famous son. It was said that Thackeray could order a dinner in every language in Europe, which is to say he could have dined in comfort in any restaurant in Soho.

From Cambridge, we learn, he made his way to the Bar, and at the same time wrote articles in the hope that some editor might keep them from the waste-paper basket. Chesterton tells us an interesting legend that about this time Thackeray offered to illustrate the books of Dickens. The offer was declined, which he thinks was 'a good thing for Dickens' books and a good thing for Thackeray's.' Whether Thackeray ever really did meet Dickens does not matter much; it is

at least picturesque; 'it affects the imagination as much as the meeting with Napoleon.'

There has always been what is for Chesterton a silly discussion—a controversy as to whether Thackeray was a cynic. This was because he happened to write first about villains, then about heroes; villains are always more interesting than heroes, and not infrequently are much better mannered. A cynic is a person who doesn't take the trouble to find the motives for things, or he takes it for granted that the motives are never disinterested ones. To say that Thackeray was a cynic because he drew a large number of villains is as untrue as to say Swift was a cynic because he wrote satire. Thackeray wrote about villains because he wished to also write about heroes; Swift was satirical because he had the intelligence to see that his contemporaries were fools when they might have been wise. The cynics are the people of to-day who write books which attribute low motives to every one, which turn love into lust, which care not what is written so long as it can be made certain that there is nothing in the world which has not a hidden meaning.

The first appearance of Thackeray in literature was in 'Fraser's Magazine,' under the pseudo name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. It is on these unimportant papers that Chesterton thinks was based the attack on Thackeray for being a cynic.

In passing, it is not necessary to say more than that Thackeray's marriage ended in a horrible manner: Mrs. Thackeray was sent to an asylum. 'I would do it over again,' said Thackeray; which was a 'fine thing to say.' It was really carrying out 'for better or worse,' which often enough really means for better only.

It will now be well at once to plunge into the very heart of Thackeray, that heart which beat beneath the huge, gaunt frame. The two books which have made his name famous, and what Chesterton thinks of them, must be now gone into.

‘The Book of Snobs’ was one of those literary rarities that has genius in its very name. No one probably really thinks himself a snob; every one likes to read of one. Thackeray brought snobbishness to a classic. There had been books of scoundrels, there had been books of heroes, there had been books of nincompoops, now there was a book of those people who abound in every community, and who are snobs.

‘This work was much needed and very admirably done. The solemn philosophic framework, the idea of treating snobbishness as a science, was original and sound; for snobbishness is indeed a disease in our Society.’

Unfortunately Chesterton is not nearly hard enough on snobbishness. Were it a disease, it might be excusable as being at times unavoidable; it is nothing of the sort, it is a deliberate thing that undermines society more than anything; it is entirely spontaneous, and flourishes in every community, from the Church to the Jockey Club.

‘Aristocracy does not have snobs any more than democracy’; but this ‘Thackeray was too restrained and early Victorian to see.’ There are at the present day a great number of people who will not see that Bolshevism is as snobbish as Suburbia, that the poor man in the Park Lodge is as much a snob as his master, who only knows the county folks. Snobbery is not the monopoly of any one set; even also is it, as Thackeray says, ‘a mean admiration’ that thinks it is better to be a ‘made’ peer than an honest gardener.

‘The true source of snobs in England was the refusal to take one side or the other in the crisis of the French Revolution.’

The title of ‘Vanity Fair’ was an inspiration. It gives the ideas of the disharmonies that can be found in any market place in any English market town on any English market day. It brings out ‘the irrelevancy of Thackeray.’ A good motto for the book is, for Chesterton, that attributed to Cardinal Newman: ‘Evil always fails by overleaping its aim and good by falling short of it.’ Our critic feels that the

critics have been unfair to Thackeray with respect to their denunciation of the character of Amelia Sedley as being much too soft, whereas Chesterton thinks she was really a fool, which is the logical outcome of being the reverse of hard.

But Amelia was soft in a very delightful way. She was 'open to all emotions as they came'—in fact, she was a fool who was wise because she has retained her power of happiness, while the hard Rebecca has arrived at hell, 'the hell of having all outward forces open, but all receptive organs closed.'

It is necessary again to refer to the charge of cynicism that is levelled against Thackeray. The mistake is, as our critic points out, 'taking a vague word and applying it precisely.' It all depends upon what cynicism really means. 'If it means a war on comfort, then Thackeray was, to his eternal credit, a cynic'; 'if it means a war on virtue, then Thackeray, to his eternal honour, was the reverse of a cynic.' His object is to show that silly goodness is better than clever vice. As I have indicated, the long and the short of the matter is that Thackeray created a lot of villains, and has therefore been called a cynic by those who don't even know what the word means, or that there is a literary blessedness in the making of villains to bring out the more excellent virtues of the heroes.

From these two monumental works that were original in every way and might almost be called propaganda, Thackeray passed on to a novel which bore the name of 'Pendennis.' It was 'a novel with nothing else but a hero, only that the hero is not very heroic,' which makes him all the more interesting, for it makes him all the more human.

But Pendennis is more than a man—he is a type or symbol. He is 'the old mystical tragedian of the Middle Ages, Everyman.' It is an epic, because it celebrates the universal man with all his glorious failings and glorious virtues. The love of Pendennis for Miss Fotheringay is a different thing to the ordinary love of man for woman; it is rather the love that is in every man for every woman. This is what I think

Chesterton means when he says 'it is the veritable Divine disease, which seems a part of the very health of youth.'

The Everyman of the Middle Ages was a symbol of what man really was. Chesterton feels that every outside force that came to Everyman had to be abnormal—for instance, 'Death had to be bony'—so he contends in 'Pendennis' that the shapes that intrude on the life of Arthur Pendennis have aggressive and allegorical influences.

'Pendennis' is an epic because it celebrates not the strength of man but his weakness. In the character of Major Pendennis, Chesterton feels that Thackeray did a great work, because he showed that the life of the so-called man of the world is not the gay and careless one that fiction depicts. It is the religious people who can afford to be careless. 'If you want carelessness you must go to the martyrs.' The reason is fairly obvious. The worldling has to be careful, as he wants to remain in the world; the religious man, of whom the martyr was the true prototype, can afford to be careless; he is not necessarily careless of life, but he can put things at their proper value. The martyr facing the lions in the Roman arena knew what life really was; the worldly woman spending her life trying to be in the company of titled people has no real idea of the value of it. It is the religious people who know the world; it is the worldly people who know nothing of it.

With the publication of 'Pendennis' the reputation of Thackeray reached that position which is sought by all authors, that of being able to write a book that should not, on publication, be put to the indignity of being asked who the writer was. Thackeray was now in the delightful position of being well established, a position that very often results in careless and poor work. It has been said with some truth that once a writer is established he can write anything he likes. This is to an extent true, and such work may even be published and fairly popular, but he will find sooner or later that his influence is on the wane.

In the 'Newcomes' Thackeray drew a character in Colonel Newcome, to whom was given the highest of literary honours, that of being spoken of apart from the book—I mean in the way that people speak of Micawber or Scrooge, almost unconsciously, without really having the actual work in which the character appears in mind. Of this book Chesterton says 'the public has largely forgotten all the Newcomes except one, the Colonel who has taken his place with Don Quixote, Sir Roger de Coverley, Uncle Toby, and Mr. Pickwick.'

Chesterton feels that Thackeray at times falls into the trick common to many writers, that of repeating himself, a trick that is natural, as it does seem in some ways that the human mind, like history, is apt to move in circles. The reason was that in some way Thackeray became tired of Barnes Newcome; the result was that from being a convincing villain he develops into a stereotyped one, the type who fires pistols into the air and is the squire's runaway son, so often found at the Lyceum.

If Thackeray 'sprawled' in the Newcomes he atones for this in 'Esmond,' if any atonement is needed for sprawling, which is probably only that Thackeray felt that there is nothing so elastic and sprawling as a human person, whether he be a villain or the reverse.

For Chesterton, 'Esmond' is in the modern sense a work of art, which is to say that it was a book that could be read anywhere. 'It had no word that might not have been used at the court of Queen Anne.' It is a highly romantic tale, but it is a sad story. It is a great Queen Anne romance; but, 'there broods a peculiar conviction that Queen Anne is dead.' The whole tale moves round a complicated situation in which a young man loves a mother and her daughter, and finally marries the mother. This work is, for Chesterton, Thackeray's 'most difficult task. It is difficult for the reason that the situation of the tale is placed between possibilities of grace and possibilities even of indecency. It is not hard to

write a graceful tale, it is easy to write a loose story; it is extremely difficult to write a story that may by a stroke of the pen be either beautiful or merely sordid. But Thackeray manipulates the keys of the tale so that 'it moves like music,' an extremely apt metaphor, where harmonies can be made disharmonies by a single note.

It is a strange fact that a sequel is seldom to be compared to its forerunner: 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' is of a schoolboy who is an eternal type; 'Tom Brown at Oxford' is a poor book that does not in the least understand Oxford. The fact is, I think, that an author cannot be inspired twice on the same subject—the gods give but sparingly, their gifts do not fall as the rains.

The sequel to 'Esmond' that Thackeray wrote, 'The Virginians,' is an 'inadequate sequel,' which is not to say that it is a poor book, but rather that it is an unnecessary one. Yet, as Chesterton says, 'Thackeray never struck a smarter note than when, in "The Virginians," he created the terrible little Yankee Countess of Castlewood.' In the same way as 'The Virginians' was a sequel to 'Esmond,' so 'Philip' was a sequel (also an inadequate one) to the 'Newcomes.'

It is strange that in two things at least Thackeray's life followed the same course as Dickens. Both occupied the editorial chair: Dickens that of the *Daily News*, Thackeray that of the *Cornhill Magazine*. Both left unfinished works: Dickens that of 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood,' Thackeray that of 'Denis Duval.'

Thackeray's last work, 'Lovell the Widower,' is 'a very clever sketch, but as a novel is rather drawn out.' 'The Roundabout Papers' make very pleasant reading. In one 'he compares himself to a pagan conqueror driving in his chariot up the Hill of Coru, with a slave behind him to remind him that he is only mortal.' In 1863, suddenly, Thackeray died, seven years before Dickens also passed away.

Chesterton has in the space of a short introduction given a very clear account of the chief characteristics of

Thackeray's works; it is no easy matter to give in a few lines the essence of a great novel, and Chesterton is not always the most concise of writers. It will now be convenient to take a few of the characteristics of Thackeray and observe what he says of them.

At once he is aware of the fact that there is no writer from whom it is more difficult to make extracts than from Thackeray. The reason is that Thackeray worked by 'diffuseness of style.' If he wished to be satirical about a character he was not so directly; rather he worked his way to the inside of the character, got to know all about it, and then began to be satirical. This is what Chesterton feels about the matter; it is no doubt the fairest way of being satirical and the most effective. Many people and writers are satirical without first of all demonstrating upon what grounds they have the right to be so. Satire is a wholly laudable thing if it is directed in a fair minded manner, but if it is only an excuse for bitter cynicism it is altogether contemptible. Thus he says of the Thackerean treatment of 'Vanity Fair,' 'he was attacking "Vanity Fair" from the inside.' It comes to this: if you want to make an extract from Thackeray you must dive about all over the place to make apparent irrelevancy become relevancy.

If the use of the grotesque was a strength of Browning (as Chesterton contends against other critics), so in the case of Thackeray that which some critics have held to be a weakness—I mean his 'irrelevancy'—is for our critic a strength. It was a strength, because it was 'a very delicate and even cunning literary approach.' It is the perfect art of Thackeray to get the right situation, not by an assumption of it, but by so approaching it that there is no way out, which is arriving at the situation by the fairest means possible.

'No other novelist ever carried to such perfection as Thackeray the art of saying a thing without saying it. Thus he may say that a man drinks too much, yet it may be false to say that he drinks.' What he did was not to say that a man

had arrived at such and such a state, but rather that things must change. If, as Chesterton says, Miss Smith finds marriage the reverse of the honeymoon, Thackeray does not say that the marriage is a failure, but that joy cannot last for ever ; that if there are roses there are also thorns. It is an admirable method, far better than saying a thing straight out. It is better to tell a man who is a cad that there is such a thing as being a gentleman, than to tell him he is a cad.

In his later life Thackeray was inclined to imitate himself. It is, I think, that the human brain is prone to move in circles. In the case of Thackeray, as our critic points out, in later days he used his rambling style, and, as was to be expected, he rather lost himself. ‘He did not merely get into a parenthesis, he never got out of it,’ which is to say that as Thackeray got older he inherited the tendencies of old age.

I have said earlier in this chapter that the charge against Thackeray of cynicism was one that was founded on a false premise. The charge that his irrelevancy was a weakness is based on another false but popular premise, that the direct method is always the best. It is usually the worst. It is the worst in warfare, it is the worst in literature, but it is possibly the best in literary criticism.

Thackeray had another quality that has laid him open to adverse criticism; that is, his ‘perpetual reference to the remote past.’ This repeated reference to the past may be a matter of conceit, or it may be that the influence of the past is genuinely felt. The reason that, as Chesterton points out, Thackeray referred so much to the remote past, was that he wished it to be known that ‘there was nothing new under the sun’; not even, as our critic says, ‘the sunstroke.’ Chesterton admits that at times Thackeray carried this tendency to an excess; also Thackeray wanted to show that the oldest thing in the world was its youth. Thus in writing of a fashionable drawing-room in Mayfair, if he referred to some classic, it was to ‘remind people how many *débutantes* had come out since the age of Horace.’ It was quite a different

thing to the pompous bishop quoting Greek at the squire's house to show that his doctor's degree, though an honorary one, had some classical learning behind it, or the small boy translating Horace to avoid the headmaster's cane. In the case of the bishop and the schoolboy, the use of the classics is, on the one hand, pomposity; on the other, discretion. In the case of Thackeray it was a reverence for the past, that it was a very large part of the present.

There are, then, roughly three main characteristics of Thackeray: his irrelevancy, his rambling style, and his frequent reference to the past. All these, Chesterton makes it clear, are matters in which the strength of Thackeray lies. Not that they are free always from exaggerations. Sometimes Thackeray became lost in his irrelevancy, sometimes he became almost unintelligible in his rambling style, now and then his use of ancient quotation became irritating. 'Above all things, Thackeray was receptive. The world imposed on Thackeray, and Dickens imposed on the world.' But it could not be put more truly than that Thackeray represents, in that gigantic parody called genius, the spirit of the Englishman in repose. 'This spirit is the idle embodiment of all of us; by his weakness we shall fail, and by his enormous sanctities we shall endure.' This is the crux of the matter which Chesterton brings out, that the weaknesses of Thackeray are his strength. He loved liberty, not because it meant restraint from law, but because he 'was a novelist'; he was open to all the influences round him, not because he had no stand-point, but because he could see merit in selection; he had an open mind, but knew when to shut it.

The passages selected from the various works have been chosen with care. It was evidently by no means an easy task. The passage chosen to show Colonel Newcome in the 'Cave of Harmony' gives in one poignant incident his character; the selection from 'Pendennis' does much the same. In the passage from 'Esmond' the story of the duel is a fine

selection; the chapter on 'Some Country Snobs' is an apt choosing; the celebrated 'Essay on George IV' demonstrates Thackeray in a very different mood. The 'Fall of Becky Sharp,' taken from 'Vanity Fair,' has not been included without forethought.

Of Thackeray's poems, Chesterton has included the most significant, and not without due 'The Cane-Bottomed Chair' finds a prominent place.

Enough has been said to show that Chesterton is not a critic of Thackeray who has no discrimination in choosing from his works. He knows what Thackeray was, wherein lay his strength and weakness. He has added a worthy companion to his fuller works on Browning and Dickens.

## *Chapter Four*

### BROWNING

**I**T will be convenient for our purpose to adhere as closely as possible to the order of Chesterton's book. It is a hard task to do justice to Browning even in a long book; the task is not simplified when, in a chapter, it is hoped to give a criticism of an intricate criticism of Browning.

There are two ways to approach such a task: The first is to take the book as a whole and write a review of it, which is a method liable to a superficiality; the second is to take such a work chapter by chapter, and to piece the various criticisms into an ordered whole. This I have attempted to do. I make no attempt to criticize the method of Chesterton's approach to Browning, or his combination of the effect of his life on his work; rather I wish to take what the critic says and comment on his remarks.

There is undoubtedly a fundamental difference between Browning and Dickens which is at once clear to any critic of these two writers. Dickens was, as I have said in an earlier chapter, born at the psychological moment. Browning happened to be born early in the nineteenth century. I cannot see that it would have mattered had he been born at the beginning of the twentieth. His early life, unlike Dickens, was normal, but it did not affect Browning adversely. Had Dickens's life been uneventful, I think it not improbable that his literary output would have been commonplace instead of, as nearly as possible, divine.

There is no particular account of Browning's family, which was probably a typical middle-class family, which is to say that they were, like many thousands of their kind, lovers

of the normal—a very good reason why later Browning should have acquired a love for the grotesque, which many people quite wrongly define as the abnormal.

The grotesque is a queer psychological state of mind; the abnormal is an extreme kind of individualism that is probably insane, provided the opposite is sane.

What is important, as Chesterton feels, is that we shall get some account of Browning's home. It is in the home that we can usually detect the embryo of future activity. The germ, although sometimes hidden, is nevertheless there, which is exactly why the commonplace home life of a genius, before the public has discovered the fact, is interesting.

To quote our critic: 'Browning was a thoroughly typical Englishman of the middle class,' and he remained so through his life.

But this middle-class Englishman walking through the streets of Camberwell, as the boys played in the gutters, was Browning, not then the master poet of the Victorian Era, but the young man who could 'pass a bookstall and find no thrill in beholding on a placard the name of Shelley.'

Browning found his early life in an age 'of inspired office boys,' an age that emerged from the shadow of the French Revolution, that extreme method of optimism which Chesterton believes no Englishman can understand, not even Carlyle himself. It was an optimism that was so, because it held that man was worthy of liberty, which is to say that no man is by his nature ever meant to be a slave.

While Browning was living his daily life in Camberwell, Dickens was existing in the blacking factory; yet again it was an age of the beginning of intellectual giants.

The Chestertonian standpoint with regard to the early days of Browning is interesting. It is a ready acknowledgment of the poetic instinct that was being slowly but surely nurtured in the heart of the unknown young man of Camberwell.

It is in this early period of his life that Browning attempts what Chesterton rightly describes as the most difficult of

literary propositions, that of writing a good political play. This Browning essayed to do, and wrote 'Strafford,' a play that dealt with that most controversial part of history, the time when kings could be executed in Whitehall under the shadow of their own Parliament.

For our critic, Strafford was one of the greatest men ever born with the sacred name of England on his brow. The play was not a gigantic success, it was not a failure; it was, as was to be expected, popular with a limited public, which is very often one of the surest criterions of merit in a book or play. The success of the play was sufficient to assure the public that Browning had brains and, what was more unusual, could put them to a good advantage.

Browning became then 'a detached and eccentric personality who had arisen on the outskirts; the world began to be conscious of him at this time.'

In 1840 our critic tells us 'Sordello' was published. It was a poem that caused people to wonder whether it was really deep, or merely pure nonsense, a distinction some people cannot ever discover in regard to Browning.

Of this poem, its unique reception by the literary world lies in the fact 'that it was fashionable to boast of not understanding,' which, as I have said, was an indication that it might be termed extremely clever or extremely stupid. It was not a poem, as has been held by some critics, that was a piece of intellectual vanity. Browning was far too great a man to stoop down to such mere banal conceit. The poem was a very different thing. It was a creature created by the obscurity of Browning's mind, which, as Chesterton thinks, was the natural reaction for a genius, born in a villa street in South London.

What is the explanation of this poem? What is its meaning? Wherein lies its soul? These are questions every lover of Browning has constantly to ask. Our critic supplies an answer, an answer that is original, and is, I think, true—the poem is an epic on 'the horror of great darkness,' that

darkness that strangely enough seems to attack the young more frequently than the old.

That which is levelled against Browning, his obscurity, is a very bulwark protecting a subtle and clear mind. This is specially so with a poet who probably of all men so lives in his own poetic world that he forgets his ideas, though clear to himself, are vague to the world occupied with conventionalities.

← The real difficulty of 'Sordello' lies in the fact that it is written about an obscure piece of Italian history of which Browning happened to have knowledge—the struggles of mediæval Italy. This obscurity is not studied, as in the case of academic distinction; it is natural. The obscurity of many of the passages of St. John's Gospel is natural because the mind of St. John dwelt on the 'depths,' as did Browning's dwell on the grotesque. The result is the same. Each needs an interpreter, each has an abundance of the richest philosophy, each has an imprint of the Finger of God.

With all the controversy it has caused, 'Sordello' has had no great influence on Browningites; its name has passed into almost contempt. Chesterton has done much to give the true meaning of this strange work. With his next poem Browning spoke with a voice that, as our critic says, proved that he had found that he was not Robinson Crusoe, which is to say that he had found that the world contained a great number of people. Despite the 1,500 millions amongst whom we 'live and move and have our being' we are apt to think that we alone are important, which is not conceit but a mere proposition demonstrating that man is a universe in himself while being but an infinitesimal part of the universe.

'Pippa Passes' is a poem which expresses a love of humanity; it is an epic of unconscious influence which, no doubt, Browning felt was the key to all that is best and noble in human activity. 'The whole idea of the poem lies in the fact that "Pippa Passes" is utterly remote from the grand folk whose lives she troubles and transforms.'

Browning's poetry in the poetical sense was now nearing its zenith. The 'Dramatic Lyrics' were published in 1842, possibly about the time that Dickens was returning from his triumphant American tour. These showed, Chesterton thinks, the two qualities most often denied to Browning, passion and beauty. They are the contradiction to critics, other than ours, who regard Browning as wholly a philosophic poet, which is to say a poet who wrote poetry not for its own sake but for purely utilitarian purpose; not that poetry of the emotions is not useful—it is on a different plane.

The poems were those that 'represent the arrival of the real Browning of literary history'; for in these he discovered what was, for Chesterton, Browning's finest achievement, his dramatic lyrical poems.

Critics have said that Browning's poetry lacks passion and the most poignant emotion of human nature, love. Chesterton, on the other hand, considers that Browning was the finest love poet of the world. It is real love poetry, because it talks about real people, not ideals; it does not muse of the Prince Charming meeting the Fairy Princess, and forget the devoted wife meeting her husband on the villa doorstep with open arms and a nice dinner in the parlour. Sentiment must be based on reality if it is to have worth. This is the strong point, for our critic, of Browning's love poetry.

The next work of importance that came from Browning's pen was the 'Return of the Druses,' which shows Browning's interest in the strange religions of the East, that queer phantastic part of the world that gave birth to a Western religion which has transformed the West, leaving the East to gaze afar off. This poem is, for Chesterton, a psychological one. It is an attempt to give an account of a human being; perhaps the most difficult task in the world, because it can never hope to solve all sides of the question. The central character of this splendid poem is one 'Djubal,' a queer mixture of the virtues of the Deity with the vices of Humanity. He is for Browning the first of a series of characters on which he

displays his wonderful powers of apologizing for apparently bad men.

He attempted, to quote our critic, ‘to seek out the sinners whom even sinners cast out,’ which Christ always did, and which His Church does not always do.

Again Browning turned his hand to writing plays, but he was always a ‘neglected dramatist’ in the sense that he had to push his plays; his plays did not push him.

His next play, ‘A Blot on the “Scutcheon,”’ is chiefly interesting, as it was the occasion of a quarrel between its author and that most eccentric of theatrical personalities, Macready. The quarrel was, our critic points out, a matter of money. But Browning failed to see this; he was a man of the world in his poems, but not in his life.

It is interesting here to see what our critic says of Browning about this period before we consider the question of his marriage. ‘There were people who called Browning a snob. He was fond of wealth and fond of society; he admired them as the child who comes in from the desert. He bore the same relation to the snob that the righteous man bears to the Pharisee—something frightfully close and similar and yet an everlasting opposite.’

It has been left for Chesterton to give the truest definition of a Pharisee that has yet been penned, because it is exactly what every man feels but has never expressed in so brilliant a paradox.

That Browning had faults Chesterton would be the last to deny. Faults are as much a part of a great man as virtues. The more pronounced the fault, the more exquisite is the virtue, especially in a man of the character of Browning, a character that had a certain ‘uncontrollable brutality of speech,’ together with a profound and unaffected respect for other people.

Chesterton’s chapter on Browning and his marriage is one of the most homely chapters of the book; it gives the lie to

those critics who have glibly said that he has no way in which to reach our hearts or cause a lump in our throats.

The very method of describing how a great man wooed a great woman, how the two loved, married, and disagreed upon certain matters, is one that has an essential appeal to the heart. The exquisite description of the effect of the death of his wife on Browning is pathetic by its very simplicity.

It is enough to say that Browning's marriage was a successful one, which is not to say that it was entirely free from certain disagreements. The domestic relations of great writers and poets have not always been of the rosiest. Swift did not make an ideal marriage—at least, not on conventional lines. Milton had a wife who utterly misunderstood that her husband was a genius. Dickens was not blessed with matrimonial bliss. Shelley found faith in one woman hard.

But Browning and his wife had no disagreements on their life interests. They were both poets, though of a different calibre. What they really did not see eye to eye upon was something which the human race is still much divided about. This great point of difference was with regard to spiritualism. Browning did not dislike spiritualism; he disliked spiritualists. The difference is tremendous. Unfortunately many of the interpreters of spiritualism have degraded it into a kind of blatant necromancy which is in no way dignified or useful. It is entirely opposed to proper psychic research.

Miss Barrett had been an invalid. Therefore Browning feared that spiritualism might have a really bad effect on his wife. 'He was sensible to put a stop to it.'

The theory, on the other hand, held by other critics of Browning than Chesterton was that his dislike of spiritualism was fostered by a direct disbelief in immortality, which is as absurd a statement as is possible to make. Spiritualism and Immortality have no necessary connection whatever, though to a certain extent Spiritualism is presumed on the belief in a future life.

But this, as Chesterton points out, was not the reason for

Browning's position; it was entirely that Browning thought 'if he had not interposed when she was becoming hysterical she might have ended in a lunatic asylum.'

As Browning spent so much of his life in Italy it will be well to see what our critic considers he thought of that country under the blue skies jutting on to the blue seas of the Mediterranean.

'Italy,' says Chesterton, 'to Browning and his wife, was not by any means merely that sculptured and ornate sepulchre that it is to so many of those cultured Englishmen who live in Italy and despise it. To them it was a living nation, the type and centre of the religion and politics of a continent, the ancient and flaming heart of Western history, the very Europe of Europe.'

Browning's life in Italy was more or less uneventful. It consisted of a conventional method—the meeting of famous Englishmen visiting Italy, the writing of numerous poems, the pleasant domestic life of a literary genius and his wife.

There was only one thing that could break it, and it came in 1861. Mrs. Browning died. 'Alone in the room with Browning. He, closing the door of that room behind him, closed a door in himself, and none ever saw Browning upon earth again but only a splendid surface.'

During his wife's life Browning had planned his great work, that of the 'Ring and the Book.' In the meantime came the death of his wife, and Browning moved on the earth alone. Of this period of his life, shortly after the death of Mrs. Browning, Chesterton gives us a clear picture. 'Browning liked social life, he liked the excitement of the dinner, the exchange of opinions, the pleasant hospitality that is so much a part of our life. He was a good talker because he had something to say.'

One of his chief faults, according to our critic, was prejudice. Prejudice is probably an unconscious obeying of

instinct; it may even be a warning. Yet it can be and often is entirely unreasonable.

Browning's prejudice was, Chesterton thinks, the type that hated a thing it knew nothing about, a state of mind that is comparatively harmless. What is dangerous is disliking a thing when we know what it is. The prejudice of Browning was synonymous with his profound contempt for certain things of which he can only speak 'in pothouse words.'

About this period Browning produced 'Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangu, Saviour of Society.' This is 'one of the most picturesque of Browning's apologetic monologues.' It is Browning's courageous attempt to allow Napoleon III to speak for himself. Yet again Browning 'took in those sinners whom even sinners cast out.'

Two years later, we are told, Browning produced one of his most characteristic works, 'Night-cap Country.' It is an elegant poem of the sicklier side of the French Revolution and the more sensual side of the French temperament.'

This is the period in Browning's life when he produced his most characteristic work. It was that time when he was nearly middle aged, when the lamp of youth was just flickering, and when the lamp of old age was about to be lighted.

← Chesterton treats the whole of this period with a calm straightforwardness that we are not accustomed to in his writings. There is no doubt, I think, of all our critic's books, that his work on Browning is the least Chestertonian, which is not in any way to disparage it, but rather to state that the book might have been written by any biographer who knew Browning's works and had the sense to see that his characteristics were such that many of his critics were unfair to him. Chesterton will never allow for an instant that Browning suffered from anything but an evident 'naturalness,' which expressed itself in a rugged style, concealing charity in an original grotesqueness of manner.

It is now convenient to turn to Browning's greatest work,

‘The Ring and the Book,’ and see what Chesterton has to say about it.

Rumour is really distorted truth, or rather very often originates from a different standpoint being taken of the same thing. Thus a man may say that another man is a good fellow but borrows money too often; another may say of the same man he is a good fellow but talks too much; a third that he is a good fellow but would be better without a moustache. The essential man is the same, but his three critics make really a different person, or, at least, each sees him from a different angle.

As Chesterton so finely points out, the conception of ‘The Ring and the Book’ is the studying of a single matter from nine different standpoints. In successive monologues Browning is endeavouring to depict the various strange ways a fact gets itself presented to the world.

Further, the work indicates the extraordinary lack of logic used by those who would be ashamed to be denied the name of dialectician. Probably, thinks Chesterton, very many people do harm in their cause, not by want of propaganda, but by the fallaciousness of their arguments for it.

There have been critics who have denied to this work the right of immortality. Chesterton is not one of these; rather he contends such a criticism is a gross misunderstanding of the work. For our critic the greatness of this poem is the very point upon which it is attacked, that of environment. For once and all Browning has demonstrated that there are riches and depths in small things that are often denied to what we think is greater.

‘It is an epic round a sordid police court case.’ ‘The essence of “The Ring and the Book” is that it is the great epic of the nineteenth century, because it is the great epic of the importance of small things.’ Browning says, ‘I will show you the relation of man to heaven by telling you a story out of a dirty Italian book of criminal trials, from which I select one of the meanest and most completely forgotten.’

It is then that Chesterton sees that this poem is more than a mere poem; it is a natural acknowledgment of the monarchy of small things, the same idea that made Dickens believe that common men could be kings—that is, in the same category as the Divine care of the hairs of the head. It gives the lie to the rather popular fallacy that events are important by their size. It is once more a position that the stone on the hillside is as mighty as the mountain of which it is only a small part.

Again, '*The Ring and the Book*' is an embodiment of the spiritual in the material, the good that can be contained in a sordid story; it is the typical epic of our age, 'because it expresses the richness of life by taking as a text a poor story. It pays to existence the highest of all possible compliments, the great compliment of selecting from it almost at random.'

There is a second respect, he feels, which makes this poem the epic of the age. It is that every man has a point of view. And, what is more, every man probably has a different point of view at least in something.

'*The Ring and the Book*,' to sum up briefly why Chesterton thinks so highly of it, is an epic; it is a national expression of a characteristic love of small things, the germination of great truths; it pays a compliment to humanity by asserting the value of every opinion, it demonstrates that even in so sordid a thing as a police court there is a spiritual spark; in a word, it is an attempt to see God, not on the hill-tops or in the valleys, but in the back streets teeming with common men.

It is now time to turn to two qualities of Browning that are full of the deepest interest, and which are dealt with by Chesterton with the greatest skill and judgment. These two qualities may be described as Browning as a literary artist and Browning as a philosopher. For our purpose it will be useful to take Browning as a literary artist first and see what was his position. Philosophy is usually in the nature of a summing up. The philosophy of a poet is best looked at when the poet has been studied; therefore it is best to follow

Chesterton's order and take Browning's philosophical position at the end of this chapter.

He feels that in some ways the critics want Browning to be poet and logician, and are rather cross when he is either. They want him to be a poet and are annoyed that he is a logician; they want him to be a logician and are annoyed that he is a poet. The fact of the matter is he was probably a poet!

Chesterton is convinced that Browning was a literary artist—that is to say, he was a symbolist. The wealth of Browning's poetry depends on arrangement of language. It is so with all great literature: it is not so much what is said as how it is said, in what way the sentences are formed so that the climax comes in the right place.

For all practical purposes Browning was, our critic thinks, a deliberate artist. The suggestion that Browning cared nothing for form is for Chesterton a monstrous assertion. It is as absurd as saying that Napoleon cared nothing for feminine love or that Nero hated mushrooms. What Browning did was always to fall into a different kind of form, which is a totally different thing to saying he disregarded it.

There is rather an assumption among a certain class of critics that the artistic form is a quality that is finite. As a matter of fact, it is infinite; it cannot be bound up with any particular mode of expression; it is elastic, and so elastic that certain critics cannot adjust their minds to such lucidity.

There is, our critic feels, another suggestion—that if Browning had a form, it was a bad one. This really does not matter very much. Whether form in an artistic sense is good or bad can only be determined by setting up a criterion; this is not possible in the case of Browning, because, though he has many forms, they are original ones, which render them impervious to values of good and bad.

Chesterton is naturally aware that Browning wrote a great deal of bad poetry—every poet does. The way to take with Browning's bad poetry is not to condemn him for it, but to

say quite frankly this poem or that poem was a failure. It is by his masterpieces that Browning must be judged.

Perhaps, as he points out, the peculiar characteristic of Browning's art lay in his use of the grotesque, which, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, is a totally different thing from the abnormal.

In other words, Browning was rugged. It was as natural for him to be rugged as for Ruskin to be polished, for Swift to be cynical (in an optimistic sense), for Chesterton to be paradoxical. Ruggedness is a form of beauty, but it is a beauty that is quite different from the commonly accepted grounds. A mountain is rugged and it is beautiful, a woman is beautiful; but the two features of the æsthetic are quite different. It is the same with poetry. There is (and Browning proved it) a 'beautfulness' in the rugged; it is a sense of being 'beautifully' rugged.

Enough has been said to make it quite clear that Browning was a literary artist; but, as Chesterton contends, an original one. He did not confine himself to any one form: his beauty lay in the placing of the 'rugged' before his readers, the method he used of employing the grotesque.

It is now an excellent time in which to look at Browning's philosophy and Chesterton's interpretation of it.

As it is perfectly true to say that every man has a point of view, a position so admirably brought out by Browning in his 'Ring and the Book,' so it is also, I think, a truism that every man has (not always consciously) a philosophy. A philosophy is, after all, a point of view; it is not necessarily an abstract academic position; nor is it always a well-defined attempt to discover the ultimate purpose of things. It can be, and very often is, a point of view really acquired by experience.

Naturally a man of the intellect of Browning would have a philosophy, and he had, as our critic points out, a very definite one.

In his quaint way Chesterton tells us 'Browning had

opinions as he had a dress suit or a vote for Parliament.' And he had no hesitation in expressing these opinions. There was no reason why he should; at least part of his philosophy, as I have indicated, lay in his knowledge of the value of men's opinions—yet again brought out in 'The Ring and the Book.'

He had, so we are told, two great theories of the universe: the first, the hope that lies in man, imperfect as he is; the second, a bold position that has offended many people but is nevertheless at least a reasonable one, that God is in some way imperfect; that is, in some obscure way He could be made jealous.

This is, no doubt, a highly unorthodox position. Yet it is a position that thousands have felt does make it plainer (as it did to Browning)—the necessity of the Crucifixion; it was a pandering to Divine jealousy.

These are, as Chesterton admits, great thoughts, and, as such, are liable to be disliked by those Christians and others who will not think and dislike any one else doing so.

This strange theological position of Browning is, I think, indicated in 'Saul.'

Chesterton usually does not agree with the other critics about most things, but he does at least agree in regard to the fact that Browning was an optimist. His theory of the use of men, though imperfect, is as good an argument for optimism as could well be found. Browning's optimism was, as our critic says, founded on experience, it was not a mere theory that had nothing practical behind it.

As I have said, Browning disliked Spiritualists; but that is not, our critic thinks, the reason he wrote 'Sludge the Medium.' What this poem showed was that Spiritualism could be of use in spite of insincere mediums. It was in no way an attack on the tenets of Spiritualism.

The understanding of this poem gives the key to other poems of Browning's, as 'Bishop Blougram's Apology,' and some of the monologues in 'The Ring and the Book';

which is, that 'a man cannot help telling some truth, even when he sets out to tell lies.'

This may be the right interpretation of these poems, but I think Browning really meant that there is an end somewhere to lying; in other words, lying is negative and temporary; truth is positive and eternal.

The summing up of Browning's knaves cannot be better expressed than by Chesterton. 'They are real somewhere. We are talking to a garrulous and peevish sneak; we are watching the play of his paltry features, his evasive eyes and babbling lips. And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God uttering his everlasting soliloquy.'

It is the essence of Browning; it is the certainty that however far distant there is the face of God behind the human features.

If there is one characteristic about this study of Browning it lies in the fact that it is a very clear exposition of a remarkable poet. A man might take up the book knowing Browning only as a name; he might well lay it down knowing what Browning was, what he achieved, what his essence was. The book is a masterly study—it lays claim to our sympathies; and never more so than when our critic describes that moment when Browning, alone in the room, saw his wife die.

## *Chapter Five*

### CHESTERTON AS HISTORIAN

THE reason that Chesterton has written a history of England is that he says no member of the public has ever done so before. This is a thing to be supremely thankful for if true; but it is entirely untrue, for the very obvious fact that history has never been written by any one who is not a member of the public. Every historian is a member of the public. Let him imagine he is not, let him carry this imagination out to a logical conclusion, and he will have a good chance of landing in a prison for failing to pay the king's taxes.

The very best people to write histories are historians, but they will never deal with history in a popular way. This Chesterton laments. He wants a history that shall be about the things that never ordinarily get into history. If he is told about the charters of the barons, he wishes to hear of the charters of the carpenters. This, he thinks, would make history popular, that word which is always used to denote something rather slight and superficial. He exclaims that the people are ignored, whereas the historian really would not be one at all if he was guilty of this charge.

The fact of the matter is, that the whole of the history of England has been so misunderstood that Chesterton has come to the rescue and has told us what really happened—in fact, all we learnt at school was waste of time; poor Green really wrote an anti-history of this country. The Romans are not of the remote past; the whole of present-day England is the remains of Rome, which is merely to say that our civilization comes down from Rome, a statement that quite

able historians have hinted at now and again. No one for an instant is so foolish as to think that the chief remains of the Romans consist of the few broken-up baths and villas up and down the country, when a splendid high road stares them in the face.

Chesterton pays enormous attention to the Middle Ages. They have, he thinks, been rather badly dealt with by historians. Too much attention is, he contends, paid to the time of the Stuarts onwards. Chesterton asks us to contemplate history as we should if we had never learnt it at school. It is, of course, true that we do not learn the essentials of our country in our schooldays. It is of no real importance that William conquered Harold in 1066, but it is of vast importance to know how he behaved as a conqueror, a fact seldom taught. But if we forgot all the history we ever knew, we should not be able to appreciate Chesterton's history, which aims to reconstruct all that we had believed while pouring over Green in the fifth form.

Chesterton covers so much ground in this book, his treatment is so intricate, his method so full of various peculiar contentions, that the only possible method in a chapter is to take some of the more important points he touches upon and try and discover what he feels about them. It will be well to realize at once that however he may differ from recognized historians, his history loses all its meaning unless the standard historians are known fairly well.

There are probably two tremendous turning points in history—the one occurred at the moment that the fatal arrow entered the eye of Harold at Senlac, the other when Henry VIII set fire to the ecclesiastical faggots that ended in the Reformation. That period which lay between them may roughly be called the Middle Ages, which part of history Chesterton thinks has been badly treated. Whether this is so is a question that opens up a broader one: Has the history

of England ever received the attention it deserves? Has right proportion been given to the most important events? Should history be made popular in the modern sense of this much misinterpreted word? These are questions to which no adequate answer can be given in the space of a chapter, nor is it within the scope of this book.

Chesterton is very annoyed to find that to possess Norman blood is, to many people, a hall mark of aristocracy: 'This fashionable fancy misses what is best in the Normans.' What he contends, and I think rightly, is that William was a conqueror until he had conquered. Then England passed out of his hands. He had wished it to be an autocracy; instead, it developed into a monarchy—'William the Conqueror became William the Conquered.' This is a line that the ordinary historians do not appear to take, though I fancy they imply it when they say that feudalism didn't exist in the time of the Georges.

Perhaps one of the most picturesque parts of history is that time when men looked across the sea and saw in the far distance a huge cross that seemed to beckon as the voices later called to Joan of Arc. The Crusades were a time when wars were holy because they were waged for a holy thing. Six hundred years, so Chesterton tells us, had elapsed since Christianity had arisen and covered the world like a dust-storm, when there arose 'a copy and a contrary: the creed of the Moslems'; in a sense Islam was 'like a Christian heresy.' Historians, so he thinks, have not understood the Crusades. They have taken them to be aristocratic expeditions with a Cross as the prey instead of a deer, whereas really they were 'unanimous risings.' 'The Holy Land was much nearer to a plain man's house than Westminster, and immeasurably nearer than Runnymede.' But I am not sure that Chesterton has scored over the orthodox historians who made a good deal out of the fact that Crusade had a close affinity to *Crux*, which word meant a cross that was not necessarily bound up with Calvary.

In dealing with the Middle Ages, he propounds the proposition that the best way to understand history is to read it backwards—that is, if we are to understand the *Magna Charta* we must be on speaking terms with Mary. ‘If we really want to know what was strongest in the twelfth century, it is no bad way to ask what remained of it in the fourteenth.’ This is a very excellent method, as it demonstrates what were the historical events and what were the mere local and temporary.

Becket was one of those queer people of history who was half a priest and half a statesman, and he had to deal with a king who was half a king and half a tyrant. Every schoolboy knows about Becket, and delights to read of the wild ride to Canterbury, which began with the spilling of Becket’s brains and ended with the spilling of the King’s blood by his tomb.

For Chesterton, Becket ‘may have been too idealistic: he wished to protect the Church as a sort of earthly paradise, of which the rules might seem to him as paternal as those of heaven, but might well seem to the king as capricious as those of Fairyland.’ The tremendously suggestive thing of the whole story of Becket is that Henry II submitted to being thrashed at Becket’s tomb. It was like ‘Cecil Rhodes submitting to be horsewhipped by a Boer as an apology for some indefensible death incidental to the Jameson Raid.’ Undoubtedly Chesterton has got at the kernel of the story that made an Archbishop a saint (a rare occurrence) and an English king a sportsman (a rarer occurrence).

But clever as Chesterton is in regard to this particular story, the ordinary schoolboy would do better to stick to the common tale of Becket that came on the hasty words spoken by a hasty king; he will better understand the significance of the whipping of the king when he can read history back to the days when kings could not only not be whipped, but could whip whom they chose, and put men’s eyes out when they used them to shoot at the king’s deer.

A great part of the Middle Ages is concerned with the French wars, those wars that staggered the English exchequer and made the English kings leaders of armies. The reason of these wars was, Chesterton tells us, the fact that Christianity was a very local thing. It was more—it was a national thing that was bound up with England. ‘Men began to feel that foreigners did not eat or drink like Christians,’ which is to say that the Englishman began his contempt for the foreigner which has resulted in nearly all our wars, and has made the Englishman abroad a supercilious creature, and has made the English schoolboy put his tongue out at the French master.

The French wars were something more than a national hatred, they were a national dislike of foreigners, a dislike that had its probable origin in the Tower of Babel. But this was not the only reason of the incessant French wars—there was a question of policy. France began to be a nation, and ‘a true patriotic applause hailed the later victory of Agincourt.’ France had become something more than a nation; it had become a religion, because it had as its figure a simple girl who believed in voices, and took her part in the struggles of a defeated country.

Chesterton’s chapter is a fine understanding of the French wars; it is an amplification of the mere skeletons of ordinary history, and as such is very valuable.

From being a reasonable national dislike, the French wars ‘gradually grew to be almost as much a scourge to England as they were to France.’ ‘England was despoiled by her own victories; luxury and poverty increased at the extremes of society, and the balance of the better mediævalism was lost.’ It resulted in the revolt connected with Wat Tyler, a revolt that ‘was not only dramatic but was domestic’; it ended in the death of Tyler and the intervention of the boy king, who, in swaying the multitude that was a dangerous mob, ‘gives us a fleeting and final glimpse of the crowned sacramental man of the Middle Ages.’

From this period Chesterton tells us that a rather strange

thing happened—men began to fight for the crown. The Wars of the Roses was the result. The English rose was then the symbol of party, as ever since it has been the symbol of an English summer.

Chesterton makes no attempt to follow the difficult path that the Wars of the Roses travel, from the military standpoint, nor the adventures that followed the king-maker Warwick and the warlike widow of Henry V, one Margaret. There was, so he says, a moral difference in this conflict that took the name of a Rose to fight for a Crown. 'Lancaster stood, as a whole, for the new notion of a king propped by parliaments and powerful bishops; and York, on the whole, for the remains of the older idea of a king who permits nothing to come between him and his people. This is everything of permanent political interest that could be traced by counting all the bows of Barnet or all the lances of Tewkesbury.'

The time when the Middle Ages was drawing near to the Tudors is interesting, because of the riddle of Richard III. Chesterton's description of this strange king is full of fascination if also it is full of truth: 'He was not an ogre shedding rivers of blood, yet a crimson cloud cannot be dispelled from his memory. Whether or not he was a good man, he was apparently a good king, and even a popular one. He anticipated the Renaissance in an abnormal enthusiasm for art and music, and he seems to have held to the old paths of religion and charity.'

He was indeed, as Chesterton says, the last of the mediaeval kings, and he died hard; his blood flowed over an England that did not know what loyalty was, a country that had nobles who would fly from their king on the first sign of danger; the Last Post of the old kings was sounding, and Richard answered its challenge. His description of this remarkable king is perhaps the best thing in the book, and is certainly far better than the ordinary history that attempts to give the character of a king in a couple of lines.

With the end of the mediæval kings we pass to a period that is none other than the Renaissance, one of the most important epochs in English history, ‘that great dawn of a more rational daylight which for so many made mediævalism seem a mere darkness.’

The character of Henry VIII is one that is a veritable battleground. He is attacked because he found a variety of wives pleasing; he is condoned as a young man who promised to be a great king. There are, as Chesterton points out, two great things that intruded into his reign: the one was the difficulty of his marriages, the other was the question of the monasteries. If Henry was a Bluebeard, he was such because his wives were not a fortunate selection. ‘He was almost as unlucky in his wives as they were in their husband.’ But the one thing that Chesterton feels broke Henry’s honour was the question of his divorce. In doing this he mistook the friendship of the Pope for something that would make him go against the position of the Church. ‘Henry sought to lean upon the cushions of Leo and found he had struck his arm upon the rock of Peter. The result was that Henry finished with the Papacy in the pious hope that it had done with him; Henry became head of the Church that was national, and soon Wolsey fell, to die in a monastery at Leicester.

But this terrible king ‘struck down the noblest of the Humanists, Thomas More, who died the death of a saint, gloriously jesting.’ The question of the monasteries is one that is solved by the simple statement that the King wanted money and the monasteries supplied it. Is there any justification for the crimes of Henry? For Chesterton ‘it is unpractical to discuss whether Froude finds any justification for Henry’s crimes in the desire to create a strong national monarchy. For whether or not it was desired, it was not created.’

Chesterton in an original way has given a very clear account of the difficulties of the reign of Henry VIII, a

reign that had perhaps more influence on English history than any other, a reign that showed what the licence of an English monarchy could do and, what is of more importance, what it could not, a reign that showed that the fall of a great man could be so precipitate that the significance of it could not be felt at the time, a reign that showed that the Pope was something more than the friend of the English throne—he was in matters of Church discipline its checkmate. This was the time that England trembled at the devilry of a king and rejoiced at the sun of a new learning that was slowly dispelling the fog of the Dark Ages

It is usually assumed that Mary was a bad woman because she burned people who were so unwise as not to be at least officially Catholics. Historians have applied the word 'bloody' to her, whereas the better word would be fanatic. 'Her enemies were wrong about her character,' says Chesterton. 'She was in a limited sense a good woman.' If Chesterton means she was a good Catholic he is right, if the burning of heretics is a good thing for a Christian Church. But the fortunate part of the whole affair was that not even burning could restore the power of the Papacy in England in Mary's time any more than the arrogance of the Roman Catholics to-day can restore the Pope to London and unfrock the Archbishop of Canterbury. Mary was a sincere fanatic, and like most fanatics was an extremely ignorant woman; consequently she could not see that the fire that burnt Cranmer also burnt the last hope of England bowing to the Pope of Rome. I cannot feel that Chesterton has in the least vindicated the character of Mary.

Historians are apt to think that the days of Queen Elizabeth were those in which England first realized that she was great. On the other hand, Chesterton is convinced that it is in this period that 'she first realized that she was small.' The business of the Armada was to her what Bannockburn was to the Scots, or Majuba to the Boers—a victory that astonished

the victors.' The fact of the matter was that Spain realized after the battle that the victory does not always go to the big battalions, which the present Kaiser is no doubt writing in his 'Imperial' copybook to-day.

The 'magnificence of the Elizabethan times has traces in mediæval times and far fewer traces in modern times.' 'Her critics indeed might reasonably say that in replacing the Virgin Mary by the Virgin Queen, the English reformers merely exchanged a true virgin for a false one.' If Elizabeth was crafty it was because it was good she should be so. If she had not been so, the history of England might have found Philip of Spain on the English throne and Mary Queen of Scots a worse menace in England, a menace that by the skill of Elizabeth developed into a headless corpse. Had Elizabeth had a different historical background, she might have been a different Queen; but, as it was, she dealt with it as only a genius could who had followed a maniacal Queen who failed in everything she did.

From the times of Elizabeth, Chesterton moves on to the age of the Puritans, those rather dull people who have always been the byword for those who are more popularly known as Prigs. 'The Puritans were primarily enthusiastic for what they thought was pure religion. Their great and fundamental idea was that the mind of man can alone directly deal with the mind of God. Consequently they were anti-sacramental.' Not only in ecclesiastical matters, they were in doctrine Calvinistic—that is, they believed 'that men were created to be lost and saved,' a theological position that makes God a Person who wastes a lot of valuable time. It was to a large extent this belief in Calvin that made the Puritans dislike a sacramental principle; it was, of course, quite unnecessary to have one. If a man was either lost or saved, the need of any human mediators was not felt.

It is, of course, true, as Chesterton says, that 'England was never Puritan.' Neither was it ever entirely Catholic, neither has it ever been entirely Protestant. It is one of the

things to be thankful for that men have ever held different religious opinions. It would be the greatest mistake if ever the Church was so misguided as to listen to the cries that come for unity, a unity that could only be founded on the subordinating of the opinions of the many to the opinion of the few.

I have said at the beginning of this chapter that Chesterton has said that the Middle Ages have not had the historical attention they deserve. Whether this is so is a question that cannot be answered here. What we have to say is whether this book is a valuable one. There are, of course, many opinions expressed in it that do not take the usual historical standpoint, or they have a more original way of expression. I cannot feel that this book is the best of Chesterton's works, not because it has not some very sound opinions expressed in it, but rather because to understand its import the ordinary histories must be well known. It is perhaps a matter of an unsuitable title, 'A Short History of England.' It would have been better to have called it a 'History of the Histories of England, and the Mistakes therein.' It would be no use as an historical book in the school sense, but as an original book on some of the turning-points of English history it is valuable. Mr. Chesterton tells us to read history backwards to understand it. This we may well do if we have read it as fully forward as he evidently has.

## *Chapter Six*

### THE POET

**A**MONGST the many outstanding qualities of Chesterton there is one that is pre-eminent—his extraordinary versatility. It cannot be said that this quality is always an advantage; a too ready versatility is not always synonymous with valuable work; especially is this so in literary matters. There are quite a number of writers who, without success, attempt to be a little of everything. This is not the case with Chesterton; if he is better as an essayist than as a historian, he is at least good as the latter; if he is better at paradox than at concise statements, he can be, if he chooses, quite free from paradox; if he excels in satire of a light nature, he can also be the most serious of critics if the subject needs such treatment.

It has often been said that a good prose writer seldom makes a good poet. This may be to a certain extent a truism; the opposite is more often the case; that a good poet is quite often a poor producer of prose. There is a good reason for this: the mind of a poet is probably of a different calibre to that of a prose writer; a poet must have a poetical outlook on life and nature; the tree to him is something more than a tree, it is probably a symbol, but to a prose writer more often than not a tree is merely a mass of bark and leaves that adorns the landscape.

Chesterton has written a great many poems, all of which can claim to be poetical in the true sense, but he has only written one really important poetical work. It is a ballad that is important for two things; firstly, it is about a very English thing; secondly, the style of the writing is nothing

short of delightful, a statement that is not true of all good poetry. It has been said that Chesterton might well be the Poet Laureate; at least, it is a matter for extreme joy that he is not, not because he is not worth that honour, but because anything that tended to reduce his poetical output would be a serious thing in these days when good poets are as scarce as really good novelists.

The poem that has established Chesterton for all time as a poet is the one he has called with true poetical genius 'The Ballad of the White Horse.' There have been many white horses, but there is The White Horse, and he lies alone on the side of a hill down Wiltshire way, where he has watched with a mournful gaze the centuries pass away as the horizon passes away in a liquid blue.

The White Horse stands for something that year by year we are forgetting, those quaint old English feasts that have done so much to make England merry, and have made history into a beautiful legend that bears the name of Alfred. Yet the White Horse is falling into neglect. The author of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' lamented the fact that people flew past the White Horse in stuffy first class carriages; were he alive now he would lament still more that English men and English women can pass the White Horse without a glance up from the novel they are reading bound in a flaring yellow cover. But there is one great Englishman who will never do this, and that is Chesterton; rather he writes of the White Horse, the lonely horse that is worthy of this splendid poem.

In connection with the Vale of White Horse there are three traditions—one, that Alfred fought a great battle there; another, that he played a harp in the camp of the Danes; a third, that Alfred proved himself a very bad cook who wasted a poor woman's cake, a poor woman who would willingly have sacrificed cakes every day to have the honour of the king under her roof.

It is of these three traditions that Chesterton writes his

poem. Whether they may be historically accurate does not much matter; there is no doubt that the Vale had something to do with the King of Wessex, and popular tradition has made the name of Alfred a national legend.

When Chesterton writes of the vision of the king he is no doubt writing of his own vision of the events that led up to the gathering of the chiefs. The Danes had descended on England like a cloud of locusts; it was the time that needed a National Champion, as time and again in the past the Israelites had needed one. It is one of the strange things of history that a champion has always appeared when he was most needed. The name of the Danes inspired terror; Wessex was shattered—

‘For earthquake following earthquake  
‘Uprent the Wessex tree . . .’

The kings of Wessex were weary and disheartened: fire and pillage had laid the countryside bare with that horrible bareness that only lies in the wake of conqueror:

‘There was not English armour left,  
Nor any English thing,  
When Alfred came to Athelney  
To be an English king.’

This was the vision that Alfred had, and he gathered the disheartened chiefs to his side till, in victory, he could bear the name of king.

In the wake of national champions there have ever appeared popular tales demonstrating the human qualities of these giants; if Napoleon could conquer empires, tradition has never forgotten that he once pardoned a sentry he found asleep at his post. If Wellington won the battle of Waterloo by military genius, so popular hearsay has urged that he commanded the Guards to charge ‘*La Grande Armée*’ in cockney terms. Around the almost sacred name of Alfred many and

various are the old wives' tales, among which the story of his harp is not the least picturesque; it is one on which Chesterton expends a good deal of poetic energy.

From the gist of the poem it is evident that Alfred, in the course of his wanderings, came near to the White Horse, but as though for very sorrow—

‘The great White Horse was grey.’

Down the hill the Danes came in headlong flight and carried Alfred off to their camp; his fame as a harpist had pierced the ears of the invaders:

‘And hearing of his harp and skill,  
They dragged him to their play.’

The Danes might well laugh at the song of the king, but it was a laugh that was soon to be turned to weeping when the king had finished his song:

‘And the king with harp on shoulder  
Stood up and ceased his song;  
And the owls moaned from the mighty trees,  
And the Danes laughed loud and long.’

There is in this poem a pleasant rhythm and a clearness of meaning that is absent from much good poetry. Chesterton has caught the wild romantic background of the time when the King of England could play a harp in the camp of his enemies; when he could, by a note, bring back the disheartened warriors to renew the fight; when he could be left to look after the cakes and be scolded when, like the English villages, they were burnt. One of the most popular of the legends is the one connected with Alfred and the woman of the forest. It has made Chesterton write some of his most charming verse.

And Alfred came to the door of a woman's cottage and there rested, with the promise that in return he would watch the cakes that they did not burn.

But— ‘The good food fell upon the ash,  
And blackened instantly.’

The woman was naturally annoyed that this unknown tramp should let her cooking spoil:

‘Screaming, the woman caught a cake  
Yet burning from the bar,  
And struck him suddenly on the face,  
Leaving a scarlet scar.’

The scar was on the king’s brow, a scar that tens of thousands should follow to victory:

‘A terrible harvest, ten by ten,  
As the wrath of the last red autumn—then  
When Christ reaps down the king.’

In a preface to this poem, with regard to that part which deals with the battle of Enthandune, Chesterton says: ‘I fancy that in fact Alfred’s Wessex was of very mixed bloods; I have given a fictitious Roman, Celt, and Saxon a part in the glory of Enthandune.’

The battle of Enthandune is divided into three parts. The poetry is specially noticeable for the great harmony of the words with the subject of the lines; it is one of the great characteristics of Chesterton’s poetry that he uses language that intimately expresses what he wants to describe. He can, in a few lines, describe the discipline of an army:

‘And when they came to the open land  
They wheeled, deployed, and stood.’

It is perfect poetry concerning the machine-like movements of highly-trained troops.

The death of an earl that occurs in a moment of battle: we can almost see the blow, the quick change on the face from life to death; we can almost hear the death gurgle:

‘Earl Harold, as in pain,  
Strove for a smile, put hand to head,  
Stumbled and suddenly fell dead,  
And the small white daisies all waxed red  
With blood out of his brain.’

Of the tremendous power of a charge, Chesterton can give us the meaning in two lines that might otherwise take a page of prose:

‘ Spears at the charge yelled Mark amain,  
‘ Death to the gods of Death.’

Whether it be to victory or defeat, the last charge grips the imagination, just as the latest words of a great man are remembered long after he has turned to dust. The final charge of the Old Guard, the remnant of Napoleon’s ill-fated army at Waterloo, the dying words of Nelson, these are the things that produce great poetry.

Some of the verses describing the last charge at Enthandune are the finest lines Chesterton has so far written. It will not be out of place to quote one or two of the best—the challenge of Alfred to his followers to make an effort against the dreaded Danes, at whose very name strong men would pale:

‘ Brothers-at-arms,’ said Alfred,  
‘ On this side lies the foe;  
Are slavery and starvation flowers,  
That you should pluck them so?’

Or the death of the Danish leader, who would have pierced Alfred through and through:

‘ Short time had shaggy Ogier  
To pull his lance in line—  
He knew King Alfred’s axe on high,  
He heard it rushing through the sky;  
He cowered beneath it with a cry—  
It split him to the spine;  
And Alfred sprang over him dead,  
And blew the battle sign.’

The last part of the poem is that which gives an account of the scouring of the White Horse, in the years of peace:

‘ When the good king sat at home.’

But through everything the White Horse remained—

‘Untouched except by the hand of Nature:  
The turf crawled and the fungus crept,  
And the little sorrel, while all men slept,  
Unwrought the work of man.’

‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ is in its way one of the best things Chesterton has done: it is a fine poem about a very picturesque piece of English legend, which may or may not be based on history. Poetry can, and very often does, fulfil a great patriotic mission in arousing interest in those distant times when Englishmen, with their backs to the wall, responded to the cry of Alfred, as they did when, centuries later, the hordes of Germans attempted to cut the knot of Haig’s army.

For hundreds of years Alfred has been turned to dust, but the White Horse remains, a perpetual monument to the great days when England was invaded by the Danes. ‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ is a ballad worthy of the immortal horse that will remain centuries after the author of the poem has passed out of mortal sight.

In an early volume of light verse Chesterton wrote of the kind of games that old men with beards would delight in. ‘Greybeards at Play’ is a delightful set of satirical verses in which the ardent philosopher confers a favour on Nature by being on intimate and patronising terms with her.

This dear old philosopher, with grey beard and presumably long nose and large spectacles, is full of admiration for the heavenly beings:

‘I love to see the little stars  
All dancing to one tune;  
I think quite highly of the Sun,  
And kindly of the Moon.’

Coming to earth, this same philosopher is full of friendly relations with America, for—

‘The great Niagara waterfall  
Is never shy with me.’

In the same volume Chesterton writes of the spread of æstheticism, and that the cult of the Soul had a terrible effect on trade:

‘The Shopmen, when their souls were still,  
Declined to open shops—  
And Cooks recorded frames of mind  
In sad and subtle chops.’

In a small volume of poems called ‘Wine, Water, and Song,’ we have some of the poems that appear in Chesterton’s novels. They have a delightful air of brilliancy and satire, about dogs and grocers and that peculiar king of the Jews, Nebuchadnezzar, who, when he is spoken of by scholars, alters his name to Nebuchadrezzar. We have but room for one quotation, and the place of honour must be given to the epic of the grocer who, like many of other trades, makes a fortune by giving short weights:

‘The Hell-Instructed Grocer  
Has a Temple made of Tin,  
And the Ruin of good innkeepers  
Is loudly urged therein;  
But now the sands are running out  
From sugar of a sort,  
The Grocer trembles, for his time,  
Just like his weight, is short.’

The hymn that Mr. Chesterton has written, called ‘O God of Earth and Altar,’ is unfortunately so good and so entirely sensible that the clergy on the whole have not used it much; rather they prefer to sing of heaven with a golden floor and a gate of pearl, ignoring a really fine hymn that

pictures God as a sensible Being and not a Lord Chief Justice either of sickly sentimentality or of the type of a Judge Jeffreys.

It must be said that to many people who know Chesterton he is first and foremost an essayist and lastly a poet. The reason is that he has written comparatively little serious poetry; this is, I think, rather a pity—not that quantity is always consistent with quality, but that in some way it may not be too much to say that Chesterton is the best poet of the day; and I do not forget that he has as contemporaries Alfred Noyes and Walter de la Mare.

The strong characteristic of his poetry, as I have said, is the wealth of language; to this must be added the exceedingly pleasant rhythm that runs as easily as a well-oiled bicycle. If Mr. Chesterton is not known to posterity as one of the leading poets of the twentieth century it will be because his prose is so well known that his poetry is rather crowded out.

## *Chapter Seven*

### THE PLAYWRIGHT

NEARLY eight years ago all literary and dramatic London focused its eyes on a theatre that was known as the Little Theatre. On the night of November 7th the critics might have been seen making their way along John Street with just the faintest suspicion of mirth in their eyes.

The reason was that the most eccentric genius of the day had written a play, and it was to be produced that night, and had the name of MAGIC, a title that might indicate something that turned princes into wolves, or transported people on carpets to distant lands, or might be more simply a play that dealt with Magic in the sense that there really was such a thing.

The play was a success—I could see that it would be at the moment Mr. Bernard Shaw so forgot himself as to be interested in something he had not himself written. The Press was charmed with the play and went so far as to say, with a gross burlesque of Chesterton, that it was 'real phantasy and had soul.' Chesterton by his one produced play had earned the right to call himself a dramatic author, who could make the public shiver and think at the same time, an unusual combination.

I rather fancy that Magic is a theological argument, disguised in the form of a play, that relies for its effects on clever conversation, the moving of pictures, and a mysterious person who may have been a conjurer and may have also been a magician.

When I say that the play is really a theological one, I do not mean to say that it has anything to do with the Thirty-Nine

Articles, the Validity of the Anglican Orders, or even the truth of the Virgin Birth; rather it is about an indefinable 'something' that is so simple that it is misunderstood by every one.

The play turns upon five people who are thrown together in a room that has a nasty habit of becoming ghostly at times.

The five people are a doctor who is a scientist, who does not believe in anything not material being scientific; a vicar who is a typical clergyman, who thoroughly believes in supernatural things until they are proved, when he becomes an agnostic; a young American who is a cad and a fool; a girl who believes in fairies and goes to Holy Communion, which is the one thing that depicts she has a certain amount of sense; a duke who ends every sentence with a quotation from Tennyson to Bernard Shaw.

These five people are influenced by a Pied Piper kind of fellow who calls himself a conjurer, and is rather too clever for the company.

Apparently the conjurer has been strolling about the garden when he meets Patricia, who thinks he can produce fairies. In due course the conjurer comes into the room, where he has encounters with the various occupants, who don't believe in his tricks; the conjurer is unlucky enough to meet the young American cad Morris Carleon, who is really quite rude to the conjurer and discovers (so he thinks) all the tricks except one in which the conjurer turns the red lamp at the doctor's gate blue. This so worries Morris that he goes up to his room with a chance of going mad.

The others beseech the conjurer to explain the trick; he does so, and says it is done by magic, which is the whole point of the play, that we are left to wonder whether it was by magic or by a natural phenomenon.

The conjurer gets the better of the parson, the Rev. Cyril Smith, who believes in a model public house and the Old Testament, and takes a good stipend for pretending to believe in the supernatural.

The result of the whole matter is magic, by which we presume the trick may have been done.

The play is in some ways a difficult one: we are left wondering whether or not Chesterton believes in magic; if he does, then the conjurer need not have been so upset that he had gained so much power of a psychic nature; if he does not, then the conjurer was a clever fraud or a brilliant hypnotist.

One thing is quite certain, Chesterton brings out the weaknesses of the dialectic of the parson and doctor in a remarkable way; he makes us realise that there are some things we really know nothing about; if lamps turn blue suddenly it may quite well be a 'Something' that may be magic and might be God or Satan; anyhow, it cannot be explained by an American young man; it is of the things that the clergy profess to believe in and very often do not.

It is, I think, undoubtedly a problem play, and I doubt very much if Chesterton knows what was the agency that did the trick, but I rather think that 'Magic' is a great play, not because of the situations, but rather because the more the play is studied the more difficult is it to say exactly what is the lesson of it.

Magic is called a phantastic comedy; it might well be called a phantastic tragedy.

## *Chapter Eight*

### THE NOVELIST

**T**HREE is perhaps no word in the English language which is more elastic than the word novel as applied to what is commonly known as fiction. The word novel is used to describe stories that are as far apart as the Poles. Thus it is used to describe a classic by Thackeray or Dickens, or a clever love tale by Miss Dell, or a brilliantly outspoken sex tale by Miss Elinor Glyn, or a romance by Miss Corelli, or a tale of adventure by Joseph Conrad, or a very modern type of analytical novel by very modern writers who are a little bit young and a big bit old.

I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that Chesterton as a novelist carries the art yet a step farther and has added elasticity to the word. It would, I think, be probably untrue to say that Chesterton is a popular novelist; he is much too unlike one to be so. That he is read by a wide public is not the same thing; he has not the following of the millions that Charles Garvice had, for the millions who understood him might find Chesterton difficult. Really Chesterton is read by a select number of people who would claim to be intellectual; very up-to-date clergymen rave about his catholicity, high-brow ladies of smart clubs delight in his knave whimsicalities, but the girl in the suburban train to Wimbledon passes by on the other side.

One of the characteristic features of Chesterton's novels is his clever selection of titles that are by their very nature fit to designate his original works. If in journalism nine-tenths of the importance of an article depends upon its title, it is equally true that the title of a novel is of the same import. Either

a title should give some indication of the nature of the book, or it should be of the kind that makes us want to read it; this is the case with regard to the Chesterton novels, their designations are so phantastic that our curiosity is aroused. Thus 'The Man who was Thursday' gives no possible explanation of what it is about, but it does suggest that it is interesting to know about a man who was Thursday; 'The Flying Inn' may be a forecast of prohibition or it may be a romance of the time when inns shall fly to the ends of the earth; 'The Napoleon of Notting Hill' leads us to suppose that perhaps there was a hidden history of that part of London, that Notting Hill can boast of a past that makes it worthy of having been a station on the first London tube.

It is unsafe to prophesy any limit to the versatility of Chesterton, but it is improbable that he could write an ordinary novel; the reason is, I fancy, that he cannot write of the ordinary emotions with the ease that he can construct grotesque situations. This is why I have said that, as a novelist, Chesterton is not popular in the sense that he is read by the masses (that word that the Church always uses to indicate those who form the bulk of the community). As a novelist, Chesterton stands apart, not because he is better than contemporary writers of fiction, but because his books are unlike those of any one else.

I have taken Chesterton's most famous novels and have written a short survey of their character. They are not always easy to understand—sometimes they seem to indicate alternative points of view; they teem with pungent wit and shrewd observations, they are without doubt phantastic, they are in the true sense clever.

### 'THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL'

At the time of the publication of this book the critics with astounding frankness admitted that, while this was a fine book, they had difficulty in deciphering what it meant. One, now a well-known Fleet Street editor, went farther, and said that

possibly the author himself did not know what he meant—a situation in which quite a number of authors have found themselves, especially when they read the reviews of their books.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill’ is not an easy book to understand: it may be a satire, it may be a serious book, it may be a prophecy, it may be a joke, it may even be a novel! I think that it is a little bit of a joke, in a degree serious—something of a satire, possibly a prophecy.

The main thing about the book is that a king is so unwise as to make a joke, and an obscure poet is more unwise in taking this Royal joke seriously. Many who have laughed at monarchical wit have found that their heads had an alarming trick of falling on Tower Hill.

In ‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill’ we are living a hundred years on, and we are to believe that London hasn’t much changed; a certain respectable gentleman has been made a king for no special reason—a very good way of having a versatile monarchy and a selection of kings.

Not far off in the kingdom of Notting Hill there resides a poet who has written poems that no one reads. He is a romantic youth, and loves Notting Hill with the love of a Roman for Rome or of a Jew for Whitechapel. The new king, by way of a joke, suggests that it would be quite a good idea to take the various parts of London and restore them to a mediæval dignity; thus ‘Clapham should have a city guard, Wimbledon a city wall, Surbiton tolling a bell to raise its citizens.’

It so happens that the obscure poet, Adam Wayne, has always seen in Notting Hill a glory that her citizens cannot see; he determines to make the grocers and barbers of that neighbourhood realise their rich inheritance. The new king, for some reason, desires to possess Pump Street in Notting Hill, and this gives the poet’s dream a chance to mature; and he gets together a huge army, with himself as Lord High Provost of Notting Hill. There are some frightful battles in the adjacent states of Kensington and Bayswater, and, after varying

fortunes, the Notting Hill Army is defeated, the Napoleon becomes again the poet of Notting Hill, while his citizens have developed from grocers to romanticists, from barbers to fanatics

That there might be in the future a Napoleon of Notting Hill is highly improbable, that London will ever return to the pomp and heraldry of the Middle Ages is not at all likely; but that in a hundred years Notting Hill will be different is quite possible. If it is not likely that there will be fights between Bayswater and Notting Hill, there may at least be battles in the air unthought of; it may well be that its citizens in times of peace will take a half-day trip, not to Kew Gardens or to Hampton Court, but to Bombay and Cape Town.

### ‘MANALIVE’

One of the strangest complications that man has to face is the criminal mind. It is so complex that no society has ever understood it; very often it has not taken the trouble to try. No method of punishment has stamped out the criminal; no reformers, however ardent, have freed the world from those who live by violence, kill by violence, and are themselves killed by violence. If crime is a disease, then to treat criminals as wrongdoers is absurd. If every murderer is insane, then hanging is nonsense; if a murderer is sane, then sanity is capable of being more revolting than insanity.

‘Manalive’ may, perhaps, be called a philosophy of the motive for crime; it may be a pseudo philosophy—at least it is an entertaining one—which cannot be said about all serious attempts at moulding the universe into a tiresome system, that is uprooted generally by the next thinker. The book opens with a very strong gale that ends with the arrival at a boarding house of a man who can stand on his head and has the name of Innocent Smith. He is somewhat like the person in the ‘Passing of the Third Floor Back,’ in that he revolutionizes the household, who cannot determine whether he is a lunatic or not; anyhow, he falls in love with the girl of the house.

Unfortunately, rumour—a nasty, ill-natured thing—has it that Smith is a criminal. Evidence is collected, and a Grand Jury inquire into the charges, which include Bigamy, Murder, Polygamy, Burglary. It looks as if Smith is in for a very uncomfortable time, and the wedding bells are a long way from ringing.

The second part of the book is concerned with these charges and the conduct and motives of Smith. But Chesterton is a clever barrister, and shows that the motives behind the 'crimes' are not only within the law, but are extremely useful and throw a new light on criminology.

The crime of murder of which Smith is accused is one that he is supposed to have perpetrated in his college days. It was nothing less than firing at the Warden. The reason was not at all that Smith wanted to murder the Warden, but, rather, to discover if his theory of 'the elimination of life being desirable' was a sincere one. It was not. As soon as the Professor thought he might attain the desired bliss of death, he desired more than anything that he might live. The fact, then, that Smith pointed a pistol at his Warden was perfectly justifiable; it had the eminently good principle of wishing to test a theory.

If Smith was a bigamist he was so with his own wife, only that he happened to like to live with her in various places; if he was a burglar, he was perfectly justified, because he merely robbed his own house—in fact, he does not wish to steal, because he can covet his own goods. Chesterton, on these grounds, acquits the prisoner.

At the end of the book another or the same great gale springs up, and Smith, accompanied by Mary of the boarding-house, disappears. Clever as Chesterton's explanations of the crimes are, we shall not probably shoot at the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge in order to demonstrate to him how desirable life really is; we shall not burgle our own sitting-room for the mere excitement of it; we shall not flit with our wife from Peckham to Marylebone, from Singapore to Bagdad, to imagine that we are bigamists or polygamists; rather, we shall

sit at home and sigh that all crimes cannot be as easily settled as those Chesterton propounds and shows are not crimes at all.

### ‘THE BALL AND THE CROSS’

It is usually assumed that a theological argument is a dull and prosy affair that has as its perpetrators either Professors of Theology or Professors of Rationalism. It is, of course, true that many Professors of Theology are dull, but they do not usually argue about theology at all. Professors of Rationalism are equally dull and are seldom happy when not engaged on the hopeless task of trying to understand God when they know nothing about Man and little about Satan.

‘The Ball and the Cross’ is a theological novel. It is, without any doubt, the most brilliant of Chesterton’s novels; it is an argument between a Christian ass and a very decent atheist. Atheists, if they are sincere, are on the way to becoming good Christians; Christians, if they are insincere, are on the way to becoming atheists.

The book opens with a theological argument in the air between a professor and a monk. This becomes to the professor so wearisome that, with great good sense, he leaves the monk clinging to the cross at the top of St. Paul’s Cathedral while he disappears into the clouds in his silver airship.

Having successfully climbed into the gallery, the monk is arrested as a wandering lunatic and taken off to an asylum. Meanwhile, a great deal of excitement is agitating Ludgate Hill, where an atheistic editor runs a paper that propounds (with all the usual insults at Christ, which culminate in an attack on the method of the birth of Christ) the creed of atheism. A particularly slanderous attack on the Virgin Mary results in an ardent Roman Catholic throwing a stone through the blasphemer’s window.

The result is that they are both brought up before the magistrate, and the two men decide to fight a duel.

The whole book really, then, consists of a theological

argument between the two, interspersed with attempts to settle their differences by a duel, which is always interrupted at the crucial moment. Finally, after queer adventures, the two arrive in a lunatic asylum, in which they are kept until the place is burned down. It so happens that the chief doctor of the place turns out to be Professor Lucifer, who had left the monk clinging to the Cross at the top of the Cathedral. He is burnt to death in an airship disaster, and the atheist and the Catholic end their adventures.

‘*The Ball and the Cross*’ is very full of fine passages. It presents the side of the atheist and the Catholic in a brilliant manner. The chapter that describes the trial before the magistrate has got the atmosphere of the police-court to perfection. Not less good is the Chestertonian satire of the comments of the Press on the case, in which Chesterton makes some pungent remarks about Fleet Street ‘stunts.’ Perhaps one of the best things in the book is the argument between the French Catholic girl and Turnbull the atheist on the doctrine of Transubstantiation. This passage must be quoted; it is one of the best arguments for the Sacrament that has been written for those people who can see that (even in these days) bread is a symbol for the Presence of the Life Giver, and wine a symbol for the Presence of the Life Force.

‘I am sure,’ cried Turnbull, ‘there is no God.’

‘But there is,’ said Madeleine quietly; ‘why, I touched His body this morning.’

‘You touched a bit of bread,’ said Turnbull.

‘You think it is only a bit of bread,’ said the girl.

‘I know it is only a bit of bread,’ said Turnbull, with violence.

‘Then why did you refuse to eat it?’ she said.

If ‘Orthodoxy’ is the finest of Chesterton’s essays, ‘Browning’ the best of his critical studies, ‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ the best of his poems, there is, I think, little doubt that this strange theological exposition, ‘The Ball

and the Cross,' is the best of his novels. It should be read by all rationalists, by all self-satisfied Christians, by all heretics, by those who are orthodox, and, above all, it should be read by those millions who pass St. Paul's Cathedral and seldom if ever give a thought to the 'Ball and the Cross' that has made the title of Chesterton's best novel.

### 'THE FLYING INN'

Chesterton is once more a laughing prophet in this book, and he has as sad a state of things to prophesy as had Jeremiah to the Israelites, those people who, if it were not that they find a place in the sacred writings, would be the most silly and futile race of ancient history.

The scene of the story is England, and the last inn is there. We are to imagine that the non-drinking wine dogma of Islam has permeated England. It is a sorry state of things when—

‘The wicked old women who feel well-bred,  
Have turned to a teashop the Saracen's Head.’

The great charm of the book is the poetry that the Irish captain recites to Pump, the innkeeper, the gallant innkeeper who, against all opposition, keeps the flag flying and the flagon full. If the book is a little overdrawn it is, no doubt, because the subject is slightly farcical; the arguments of the Oriental are well put, and, if the discussion of the merits of vegetarianism are a little wearisome, the poetry of a vegetarian is splendid:

‘For I stuff away for life  
Shoving peas in with a knife,  
Because I am at heart a vegetarian.’

Thus, if we observe queer manners at Eustace Miles we shall know the reason.

No doubt the adventures of the last innkeeper in England would be wonderful; there would be half-day trips to see him; bishops would flock to gaze upon the last relic of a pagan

England; the Poet Laureate might so forget himself as to write an 'Epic of the Last Innkeeper'; editors would be sending lady reporters to give the feminine view of the finish of drinking; publishers would fall over one another in their eagerness to secure the 'Memoirs of the Last Publican'; the Salvation Army would put the last drunkard in the British Museum as a prehistoric specimen; on the death of this National Hero, the Dean of Westminster would politely offer the Abbey for a memorial service, with no tickets for the best places.

Chesterton gives other adventures to this last innkeeper. He is, we hope, a false prophet for this once. Were there to be no beer perhaps not even the pen of Chesterton would be able to describe the scenes that would take place in England.

#### 'THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY'

Anarchy is a very interesting subject and is used to denote very different things. It may be something that puts a bullet through a king with the insane hope of ending the monarchy; it may be an act of a God-fearing Protestant clergyman when he attempts to harry the Catholics by denying that the crucifix is the proper symbol of the Christian religion; it may be the act of God when a village is destroyed by an earthquake or an island created by a seaquake.

'The Man who was Thursday' is about an anarchist, and we are not sure whether Chesterton is not pulling our respectable legs and laughing that we really believed the party of desperadoes were real anarchists. The fact is, the book starts in a highly respectable suburb that might be anywhere near London and could not be far from it.

There are two poets strolling about under the canopy of a lovely sky; one believes in anarchy, the other doesn't—the one who does invites the one who does not to come with him and see what anarchy is. This he does, and, after a good supper of lobster mayonnaise, the two get down to a subterranean cavern where are assembled half the anarchists of the world,

precisely six; they call themselves by the names of the week, with a leader, who is met with later, Sunday.

Syme, the visitor, is appointed as a member, and becomes, Thursday; he has a great many adventures, including breakfast, overlooking Leicester Square, and gradually discovers that the said anarchists, unknown at first to each other, are really Scotland Yard detectives.

The only real anarchist is the poet who believed in it, whose name is Gregory. He has the pious wish to destroy the world; he may be Satan, if that person could ever pretend to be a poet.

What does Chesterton mean by this strange weird tale that is almost like a romance of Oppenheim and is yet like an old-world allegory? Is he laughing at anarchists that they are but policemen in disguise? Is he saying that policemen are really only anarchists? Or does he mean that the Devil masquerades as the spirit of the Holy Day of the week 'Sunday,' or is 'Sunday' really Christ?

Chesterton calls this novel a nightmare; a nightmare is usually a muddled kind of thing with no connections at all; it is a dream turned into a blasphemy. The book may mean several things; it is quite possible that it may mean nothing; there is no need for a novel to mean anything so long as it is readable. 'The Man who was Thursday' certainly is that, but it leaves us with an uneasy suspicion that it is a very serious book and at the same time it may be merely a farce.

Space does not permit us to more than mention Chesterton's two detective books, 'The Innocence of Father Brown' and 'The Wisdom of Father Brown.' They are a highly original series of detective tales. 'The Club of Queer Trades' is a volume of quaint short stories full of Chesterton's genius.

Since Chesterton wrote these books an event has occurred to him which may have a considerable effect on his writings. His novels have always shown a Catholic tendency when they have touched at all on religion. They have not, of course, the propagandist setting of the works of Father R. H. Benson,

nor do they have a contempt for other Churches that so often blackens the writings of Roman Catholic apologists.

The event is one that has occasioned the usual mistake in the Press. They have said with loud emphasis, 'Mr. Chesterton has joined the Catholic Church.' He has not; there is, unfortunately, no Catholic Church that he could have joined; what he has done is to be received into the Roman part of the Catholic Church.

This is a matter of importance to Chesterton; it is a matter of far greater importance to the Roman Catholics. If the Roman Church is wise she will not put her ban on Chesterton's writings—his intellect is far beyond the ken of the Pope; his utterances are of more import than all the Papal Bulls. She has secured, as her ally, one of the finest intellects of the day, one of the best Christian apologists.

If, then, we have further novels from the pen of Chesterton we shall expect them to have a Roman bias, but we shall hope that they will not bear any signs that Rome has dictated the policy that has made many of her best priests mere puppets, afraid, not of the Church, but of the Pope, who often enough in history has been a very ignorant man.

Of present-day novelists it is in no way fair to compare them to Chesterton; 'some contemporary novelists are better than he is, some are worse.' These are statements the writer of this book has often heard; they are entirely unfair. Chesterton, as I have said, stands apart; his works are for the most part symbolic. This is their difficulty: any of his books may be the symbol for several points of view with the exception of his religious position, which is always on the side of Christianity, and, I think, the Roman Catholic interpretation of it; his dialogue is worthy of Anthony Hope, his dramatic power is intense, his satire is never ill-natured, it is always cutting, his humour is gentle, pathos is rare in his novels, he has never described a woman, he is undoubtedly a philosopher, but he is not one who is academic, above all he is the genial writer of phantastic tales that are as wide as the universe.

## Chapter Nine

### CHESTERTON ON DIVORCE

IT may be somewhat arbitrary to proceed straight away to nearly the end of Chesterton's 'Superstition of Divorce' to find an argument that shows that he doesn't quite understand what divorce aims at; but it is well, when taking note of a book on an alleged abuse of modern society, to also see that the writer has got hold of the right end of the stick. It is no doubt unfortunate that many marriages said to be made in heaven end in hell. Divorce may be a sign that men have no reverence for marriage, it may equally be an argument that they reverence it very much; but there is no good reason for attributing to divorce only very low motives and one of the lowest that can be found; consequently I have started in the middle of this book.

In a chapter on the tragedies of marriage, Chesterton remarks that 'the broad-minded are extremely bitter because a Christian, who wishes to have several wives when his own promise bound him to one, is not allowed to violate his vow at the same altar at which he made it.' What most people who wish for a divorce want is that they shall have, not several wives, but one, who shall prove that Christian marriage is not a horrible farce, that the words of the priest were not a miserable blasphemy. Chesterton has made a very big mistake if he thinks that the exponents of divorce wish the Church to be a party to polygamy; what they want is that the Church shall show a little common sense and not rely on the tradition of hotly disputed texts. *Depends on that.*

I think it is perfectly clear that Chesterton can see no good in divorce at all. I have said it may be a very good argument

for those who wish to make marriage what it is said by the Church to be—a Divine institution. Many people seek divorce, not that, as Chesterton implies, they shall run away with the wife of the man across the square, but that, having been unlucky in a speculation, they wish quite naturally and quite rightly to try again, to the infinite satisfaction of all parties. If the Church does not agree that divorce is ever right, so much the worse for that Divine institution; if the Church is right in holding that marriages are made by God, then civil marriages are not marriages at all, and there is no need to worry about divorce, because the most ardent reformer does not imagine that man can undo the Divine decree; on the other hand, the Church never will face the fact that, if all marriages in a church by a priest are Divine, then it is rather strange that the result of them very often would be more consistent with a Satanic origin.

I am dwelling at some length on this theological argument because, though Chesterton does not base his case on that argument, he undoubtedly considers that divorce is against the Church's teaching, and the Church to which he now belongs would not allow him to think otherwise. Before I finally leave this side of the question there is one other consideration that must be faced. Whatever the texts in the New Testament relating to divorce may mean, it is rather unfortunate that they are attributed to a bachelor. Whether Christ had any good reason for knowing anything about divorce is not an irreverent one, but it is one that the Church must face to-day.

Another thing that Chesterton does not seem to realize is that many people do not want divorce to marry again, but to be free of a partner who is not one in the most superficial sense of the word; at the same time a separation does not meet the case, as it is always possible that a man or woman may wish to take the matrimonial plunge again. Chesterton seems to think it is amusing to poke fun at those who are sensible enough to wish to make lunacy a sufficient ground for divorce. 'The process' he says, 'might begin by releasing

somebody from a homicidal maniac and end by dealing with a rather dull conversationalist.' He might have added, to make the joke complete, or from some one who snores, or keeps cats, or reads Bernard Shaw.

'To put it roughly,' says Chesterton, 'we are prepared in some cases to listen to a man who complains of having a wife. But we are not prepared to listen at such length to the same man when he comes back and complains that he has not got a wife. In a word, divorce is a controversy about remarriage; or, rather, about whether it is marriage at all.' To a certain extent Chesterton is right when he says that the controversy about divorce is really about remarriage, but what he forgets is, that for the hundreds who want divorce to be remarried, there are thousands who want it to be unmarried.<sup>1</sup> The reason a man complains of having a wife is, of course, often that he prefers a mistress; but it is equally true that another cause for complaint is that his wife has for him none of the recognized attributes of the normal state of wifehood.

I have always understood that in some sense Chesterton was a journalist of the kind who is rather hard on journalism, but I did not know until I read this book on divorce that he so little understood newspapers and their writers. Commenting on the fact that the Press is sensible enough to use divorce as a news item, he says: 'The newspapers are full of an astonishing hilarity about the rapidity with which hundreds of thousands of human families are being broken up by the lawyers; and about the undisguised haste of the "hustling" judges who carry on the work.' I wonder if Mr. Chesterton ever reads the leaders of certain papers, leaders which never fail to regret the enormous amount of divorce there is. If it be true that there is a great deal of news of divorce in the Press, it is because the Press does not give news of an imaginary world that is a Utopia, but of the dear old muddle-headed world as it is. Does Chesterton fail to see that if the newspapers did not report the Divorce Courts, the numbers of cases would increase from thousands to millions? It is useless Chesterton sighing that

Why?

lawyers have become breakers of families; they have also become restrainers of suicide. If the judges hustle, it is because they are sensible enough to see that most of the divorces are justifiable; when they have not been, they have not been slow to say so.

Yet again Chesterton repeats the somewhat superficial argument against divorce that its obvious effect would be frivolous marriage. The normal person on his or her wedding day luckily does not think about anything beyond the supreme happiness they have found at least at the time. It is lightly said that the modern Adam and Eve think of the chances of divorce before marriage whatever may be the cause of divorce afterwards; at least it will be agreed that it is a failure of a particular two people who thought that their lives together would be a mutual happiness. Therefore, when Chesterton says that divorce is likely to make frivolous marriages he is saying that couples about to marry do so expecting it to be a failure. If this be so, then the young men and women of to-day are more hopeless than they are commonly made to appear by correspondence about them in the papers. If, on the other hand, every couple on marriage knew for a certainty that it was 'till death us do part,' it is more than likely that marriage would be a thing that was abnormal, not normal. It might even be that the Church would have to listen to reason, and be disturbed over worse things than divorce, and whether she should endeavour to take a Christian attitude to those who had been unfortunate or indiscreet.

Chesterton is very concerned that the time will come when 'there will be a distinction between those who are married and those who are really married.' This is precisely to state what is Utopia. At present many people who are really married are in the chains of slavery; the more who get out of it the better. As the number of those whose marriages are a farce will gradually diminish, thus will divorce be a godsend. Divorce is, in certain cases, a godsend, but the priests refuse to listen to the Divine revelation.

"Whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder"

Chesterton sketches at some length the nature of a vow. He considers that Henry the VIII broke the civilization of vows when he wished to have done with his wife. It is quite possible that he did, but it is also possible that she did precisely the same thing. The question in regard to our inquiry is: Is the marriage vow entirely binding even when the other party to the contract has broken it? The opponents of divorce, amongst whom are Chesterton, will quite easily say that it is, yet they cheerfully ignore the fact that in a marriage two persons make a contract, and if one breaks it there is quite a good reason that the vow made is no longer one at all. It is a very interesting question whether a vow should ever be broken. Should Jephthah have broken the vow that sacrificed his daughter? Should Herod have broken his vow that laid the head of John the Baptist on a charger? Should two people remain together when (if they have not broken their actual vows) they have lost the spirit of them? The opponents of divorce, who are so eager over the keeping of the marriage vow, are they as eager that it shall be but a miserable skeleton?

Chesterton does not see any particular reason why the exponents should be anxious to secure easier divorce for the poor man. It is, he thinks, 'encouraging him to look for a new wife.' If he has a wife who isn't one at all, the best thing for him is to look for another who will prove to be so, otherwise he will search for the nearest public-house and a cheap prostitute. Surely it is better that it be granted his first marriage was a failure and let him try decently for a better?

Of course, the most sensible plan would be to give divorce for all sorts of small things; people would soon then tire of it. Chesterton tells us that already in America there is demand for less divorce consequent on the increased facilities over there. In England there is demand for more. Let it be given freely and the demand will soon cease. Why should our policy be dictated by a celibate priesthood? Does Chesterton think that people who hate one another are going to live together as though they were the most ardent lovers? Does he consider

that it would be better to have no divorce and no marriage as a consequence? Does he consider that ill-assorted couples will make happy nations? Does he really consider that divorce can destroy marriage? Does he consider that the newspapers print the divorce cases because they have no other copy?

Chesterton's book is, I think, unfair on some points. He considers divorce is a superstition; he holds that it is pernicious from a social standpoint; he considers that it encourages adultery; he considers that it is the breaking of a vow; but has he ever seriously considered that if all divorce is wrong, that marriage very often is the most miserable caricature of Divinity possible? Has he thought what the state of the country would be if no marriage could ever be broken or a fresh matrimonial start made? If such a thing happened it might make him write a book on the 'Superstition of Non-Divorce.'

## *Chapter Ten*

### ‘THE NEW JERUSALEM’

HERE are four ways of going to Jerusalem—the one is to go as a pilgrim would go to Mecca ; another is to go as a tourist in much the way that an American staying in Russell Square might start for a trip round London. Again, it is possible to go to Jerusalem for yet a third reason, that of wishing quite humbly to be in some way a modern Crusader. There is yet a fourth way, which is to be made to go for reasons that are called military and are really political.

‘The New Jerusalem’ is, above all, a massive book. It is the record of a tour, and it is something more, it is an appreciation of the Sacred City on a Hill. It is, in a limited sense, a philosophy of the Holy Land; it deals in a masterly way with problems connected with the Jews; it is so unscholarly as to insist that the scholars who refuse to call the Mosque of Omar that at all are pedantic; it has a fine chapter on Zionism; it describes Jerusalem, not so much as a city, but as an impression that fastened itself on the mind of Mr. Chesterton.

There are some very fine passages in the book that deal with the curious question of Demonology, that peculiar belief which finds a place in the New Testament in the story of the Gadarene swine, and who, Chesterton felt, might still be found at the bottom of the Dead Sea—‘sea swine or four-legged fishes swollen over with evil eyes, grown over with sea grass for bristles, the ghosts of Gadara.’

One of the most interesting chapters of this book is that which is entitled ‘The Philosophy of Sightseeing.’ There is, of course, a philosophy of everything, of boiling eggs, of race-horses, of the relations of space and time—in fact, Philosophy is

a sort of Harrods, that sums up anything from a Rolls Royce to a packet of pins.

To some people there must be almost something incongruous in the idea of sightseeing in the Holy Land, yet it is probable that of the crowds round the foot of the Cross, on which was enacted the world's greatest blessing, a great part were idle sightseers who, twenty centuries later, might have been a bank holiday crowd on Hampstead Heath. Chesterton found that there was a philosophy in sightseeing; he had been warned that he would find Jerusalem disappointing, but he did not. He could be interested in the guide who ‘made it very clear that Jesus Christ was crucified in case any one should suppose that He was beheaded.’ He could see that the ‘Christianity of Jerusalem, after a thousand years of Turkish tyranny, survived even in the sense of dying daily’; fascinating as Chesterton found Jerusalem, much as he insists that the ‘sights’ of the city must be seen in their right perspective, yet he has sympathy with the man who only ‘sees in the distance Jerusalem sitting on the hill and keeping that vision’ lest going further he might understand the city and weep over it.

Chesterton devotes a long and careful chapter to the question of the Jews, of whom Christ was the chief; but, notwithstanding, thousands of His so-called followers quite forget this, and scarcely will admit that the Jew has a right to live. The reason is, no doubt, that the Fourth Gospel uses the word *ιουδαιος* in the sense of those who were hostile, consequently many entirely orthodox Christians are anti-Jewists, quite oblivious of the very reasonable request of St. Paul that in Christ are neither Jew nor Gentile. This is, in brief, the theological side of the vexed question of Zionism. Chesterton makes it quite clear that he thinks it desirable that ‘Jews should be represented by Jews, should live in a society of Jews, should be judged by Jews and ruled by Jews,’ which is of course to say that the Jews should be a nation. But the fact remains, do they wish to be so, and, if they do, is it necessary

to them, or even congenial, that it shall be in Palestine? It is no way the province of this book to go into this question; it has been enough to say that it is perfectly evident that Chesterton desires for the Jew the dignity of being a separate nation.

Is there any particular characteristic in this record of Chesterton's visit to Jerusalem? Is it anything more than an impression of a wonderful experience, when a great writer left his home in Buckinghamshire and passed over the sea and the desert to the city that is older than history and is now new? I do not think that the book can be called more than a Chestertonian impression of Jerusalem, with an appreciation of the vexed history of that strange city which is Holy. It does not forget the problems in connection with Palestine, but it has no particular claim to having said very much that was new about the New Jerusalem. Yet it has avoided the obvious: it is not of the type of book that is read at drawing-room missionary meetings, which are more often than not written in a surprised style, that the places mentioned in the Bible are really somewhere.

I almost feel as if this book is something of a guide-book—in fact, it was inevitable that it should be so. I rather fancy that descriptive writing is for Chesterton difficult; it is a little bit too descriptive, which is to say it is not always easy to imagine the scene he is trying to describe. I am not sure that the Jews will be flattered to be told that Chesterton thinks they are worthy of being a nation; it is slightly patronizing.

Yet the New Jerusalem is a book to read, but it is not of the Holy City that St. John saw in the Revelation; it is of the New Jerusalem of the twentieth century, which is very imperfect, yet is Holy. It is a book of a city that was visited by God, Who did not deem Himself too important to walk in its streets; it is of a city teeming with difficulties; it is of a city that has felt the iron hand of the conqueror; it is finally Jerusalem made into a symbol by the hand of Mr. Chesterton.

## *Chapter Eleven*

### MR. CHESTERTON AT HOME

**T**HERE is a very remarkable fascination about the home life of a great man whatever branch of activity he may adorn. If he is an archbishop, it is interesting to know what he looks like when he has exchanged his leggings for a human dress; if he is a pork millionaire, we like to see whether he enjoys Chopin; if he is a great writer, the interest of his home life is intensified. For the tens of thousands who know an author by his books, the number who know him at home may quite well be measured by the score.

There is always an idea that a great man is not as others; that he may quite conceivably eat mustard with mutton, or peas with a spoon; that his conversation will be of things the ordinary man knows nothing about; that he is unapproachable; that he is, in short, on a glorified pedestal. This love of the personal is demonstrated in the absurd wish people have to know about the private doings of Royalty, it is shown in the remarkable fact that thousands will hang about a church door to see the wedding of some one who is of no particular interest beyond the fact that they are in some way well known; it is again seen in the interest that people display in those parts of a biography that deal with the life of the public man in his private surroundings.

When I first knew Chesterton he was living in a flat in Battersea, a charming place overlooking a green park in front and a mass of black roofs behind. Here Chesterton lived in the days when he was becoming famous, when the inhabitants of that part of London began to realize that they had a great man in their midst, and grew accustomed to seeing a romantic figure in a cloak and slouch hat hail a hansom and drive off to Fleet Street.

[Later, Chesterton moved to Beaconsfield, a delightful country town, built in the shape of a cross, on the road from London to Oxford. He has here a queer kind of house that is mostly doors and passages, and looks like a very elaborate dolls'-house; it is rather like one of the Four Beasts, who had eyes all round, except that instead of having eyes all round it has doors all round; and I have never yet discovered which is really the front door, for the very good reason that either of the sides may be the front.]

In a very charming essay, Max Beerhobm, one of the best essayists of the day, gives warning to very eminent men that if they wish to please their admirers a great deal depends on how they receive those who would pay them homage. He tells us of how Coventry Patmore paid a visit to Leigh Hunt and was so overcome by the poet's greeting—‘This is a beautiful world, Mr. Patmore’—that he remembered nothing else of that interview. I remember one day it so happened that I had to pay a visit to Anthony Hope. I knocked tremblingly at his door in Gower Street and followed the trim housemaid into the dining-room. Here I found an oldish man with his back to me. Turning round at my entrance he said, without any asking who I was, ‘Have a cigarette?’ And this is all that I remembered of this visit.

The best way, according to Max Beerbohm, is for the visitor to be already seated, and for the very eminent man to enter, for ‘Let the hero remember that his coming will seem supernatural to the young man.’

I cannot remember the first time I saw Chesterton, whether he was seated or whether I was; whether his entrance was like a god or whether he was sitting on the floor drawing pirates of foreign climes or whether he was wandering up and down the passage. Chesterton is so remarkable-looking that any one seeing him cannot fail to be impressed by his splendid head, his shapely forehead, his eyes that seem to look back over the forgotten centuries or forward to those yet to come.

If there is one thing that is characteristic of Chesterton,

it is that he always seems genuinely pleased to see you. Many people say they are pleased to see you, yet at the same time there is the uncomfortable feeling that they would be much more pleased to see you leaving. This is not the case with Chesterton: he has the happy advantage of making you feel that he really is glad that you have come to his house. This is not so with all great writers. Carlyle, if he liked to see a person, did not say so; Tennyson did not always trouble to be polite; Swift would receive his guests with a gloomy moroseness; Dickens was a man of moods; conversation with Browning was not always easy. Great men do not always trouble to be polite to smaller ones.

What a wonderful laugh Chesterton has. It is like a clap of thunder that suddenly startles the echoes in the valley; it is the very soul of geniality. There is nothing that so lays bare a man's character as his laugh—it cannot pretend. We can pretend to like; we can pretend to be pleased; we can pretend to listen; we can't pretend to laugh. Chesterton laughs because he is amused; he is amused at all the small things, but he seldom laughs at a thing.

I have often and often sat at his table. He talks incessantly. There is no subject upon which he has not something worth while to say. His memory is remarkable; he can quote poet after poet, or compose a poem on anything that crops up at the table. I do not think it can be said that Chesterton is a good listener. This is not in any way conceit or boredom, but is rather that he is always thinking out some new story or article or poem. Yet he is a good host in the niceties of the table; he knows if you want salt; he does not forget that wine is the symbol of hospitality.

It has been said that Chesterton is one of the best conversationalists of the day. Conversation is a queer thing; so many people talk without having anything to say; others have a great deal to say and never say it. Chesterton can undoubtedly talk well; he has a knack of finding subjects suitable to the company; though he does not talk very much of things of the day; he is

naturally mostly interested in books. Given a kindred soul the two will talk and laugh by the hour.

Naturally, Chesterton has to pay the price of greatness: he has visitors who will make any pretence to get into his presence. But many are the interesting people to be found at his home. I remember one day, some years ago, when Sir Herbert Tree called to see him. I do not recollect what they talked about, but the time came for the famous actor to go. The last I saw of him was the sight of his motor-car disappearing and Sir Herbert waving a great hat, while Chesterton waved a great stick. I never saw Tree again. Not long after, the world waved farewell to him for ever.

One of the most frequent visitors to his home is Mr. Belloc, and it is said that he always demands beer and bacon. One day it so happened that Mr. Wells came in about tea-time. He seemed, it is said, gloomy during the meal, and finally the cause was discovered! Mr. Wells also wanted beer and bacon. It was forthcoming, and the great novelist was satisfied. It is at least interesting to know that on one point at least Belloc and Wells are agreed—that beer and bacon are very excellent things.

No word of Chesterton's home life would be complete without reference to his dog Winkle. Winkle was more than a dog, he was an institution; he had the most polished manners—the more you hurt him the more he wagged his tail; if you trod on his tail he would almost apologize for being in the way. He knew his master was a great man; he had a certain dignity, but was never a snob. But the day came that Winkle died, and was, I am sure, translated into Abraham's Bosom. Chesterton has now another dog, but he will never get another Winkle. Such dogs are not found twice. I am not sure, but I think one day Winkle will greet Chesterton in the Land that lies the other side of the grave.

It is, I think, well known that Chesterton has a great liking for children. He is often to be seen playing games with them or telling them fairy stories; he is an optimist, and no

optimist can dislike children. He probably likes children for the very good reason that he is quite grown up; it is no uncommon thing to see him sitting on the floor drawing pictures to illustrate his stories. Which reminds me that Chesterton is a remarkably clever artist. I would solemnly warn any one who does not like his books defaced not to lend them to Chesterton. He will not cut them, he will not leave them out in the sun, he will not scorch them in front of the fire, but he will draw pictures on them. I have looked through many books at his home—nearly all of them have sketches in them. I have not the qualifications to speak of his art; I do not know whether he can be considered a great artist; I do not know whether it is a pity that he does not do more drawing; I do not know whether he can really be called an artist in the modern sense at all—but I do know that at his home there are many indications that he likes drawing, especially sketches of a fantastic nature.

Chesterton does nearly all his work in his little study, a sanctum littered with innumerable manuscripts. He, like most authors of the day, dictates to a secretary, who types what he says. It is, I think, in many ways a pity that so many authors type their manuscripts; for not only are they machine-made, they have not the interest that they should have for posterity. What would the British Museum have lost if all the manuscripts had been typewritten! Chesterton's written hand is extremely elegant. At one time I believe he used to write his own manuscripts. The typewriter is, after all, but one more indication that we live in times when nothing is done except by some kind of machinery; all the same, I could wish that even if typewriters are used famous authors would keep one copy of their writings in their own hand.

It is remarkable the amount of work that Chesterton gets through. He has masses of correspondence, he has articles to write, books to get ready for press, and yet he finds time to help in local theatricals, to give lectures in places as wide apart as Oxford and America (and what is wider in every way than those two places?), that mean all that is best in the ancient world

and all that is best in the modern. He can also find time to take a long tour to Palestine to find the New Jerusalem, that city that Christ wept over, not because it was to be razed to the ground, but because its inhabitants were fools.

What are the general impressions that a stranger visiting Chesterton would get? He would, I think, be impressed by his genial kindness; he would be amazed by his extraordinary powers of memory and the depths of his reading; he would be gratified by the interest that Chesterton displays in him; he would be charmed by the quaintness of his home. That Chesterton has humour is abundant by his conversation; that he has pathos is not so apparent. I am not perfectly sure that he can appreciate the things that make ordinary men sad. It has been said that he is not concerned with the facts of everyday life; if he is not, it is because he can see beyond them—he can see that this is a good world, which makes him a good host; he can look forward across the ages to the glorious stars that shine in the night sky for those who are optimists, as Chesterton is, and are great men in their own homes.

## *Chapter Twelve*

### HIS PLACE IN LITERATURE

**I**N a very admirable discussion on the word 'great,' in his study of Dickens, Chesterton remarks that 'there are a certain number of people who always think dead men great and live men small.' The tendency is natural and is entirely worthy of blame. If a man is great when he is dead, then he was great when he was alive. It is but a re-echo of much of the folly talked during the war, when we were so credulous as to believe that every dead soldier was a saint and every live one a hero. Then, when the war was over, these hero worshippers quietly forgot that the soldiers had been heroes, put up stone crosses to the dead, and did little to remove the crosses from the living.

There are a number of quite well meaning people who will say, without much thought, that Chesterton is a great man, and if you ask them why, they will answer, 'He is a great writer, he is a great lecturer, he must be great; look at the times he appears in the Press, look at the wealth of caricature that is displayed on him.' No doubt these are good reasons in their way, but they rather indicate that Chesterton is well known in a popular sense; they are not a true indication that he is great. The public of to-day is inclined to measure greatness by the number of times a person appears in the newspapers, it seldom realizes that greatness is, above all, a moral quality, not a quantity; the fact that a person is in front of the public eye (very often a blind eye) is no indication of true greatness. If it was, then of necessity every Prime Minister would be a great man, every revue actress would be a great woman, every ordinary person would be small.

It is one of the most difficult things possible to determine what is the place a writer takes in literature. It does not make the task easier when the writer is not only alive but is still a comparatively young man in the height of his powers. A pure and simple biography cannot always determine with any satisfaction its subject's literary standing. Critical studies of classic authors do not usually give any precision about the exact niche the subject fills:

Literature is one of the most elastic qualities of the day, of human activity; it cannot be bound by rules, yet has a more or less artificial standard, which is, perhaps, an imaginary line which has style on the one side and lack of style on the other. Yet there is a further difficulty: it is in no way fair to award an author his place in literature entirely by his style, nor is it fair to literature to disregard it.

I have anticipated in earlier chapters some of what must be said in this, but it is not, I think, out of place to attempt to write of the literary qualities of Chesterton and of his place in contemporary literature. With regard to his position in respect of former writers I must say something, but it would not be wise to give any comment of what may be the permanent place of Chesterton in the world of books. He has, I hope, many years of literary output in front of him. It cannot be ignored that his reception into the Roman Catholic Church may greatly influence his future writings; it is too soon to make any effort to predict whether his writings will stand the test of time, whether he will be popular in a hundred years or whether he will have the neglect that has attended some of the greatest of authors.

There is a question that must be faced. Has Chesterton a place in literature at all, if, as is the usual thing, we have to compare him with contemporary writers, or is it that he has such a unique place that it is impossible to compare him to any living writer? Probably, although it is not necessary, it is best to compare Chesterton with some of the greatest writers of the day, and see why it is that he is worthy of a place in the

foremost rank. There are, at the present day, a great number of writers who would appear worthy of a foremost place in literature. Those I have chosen have been selected because, in a sort of vague way, people couple them with the name of Chesterton. They are, I think, H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw and Hilaire Belloc.

I do think that all these writers have a unique place in contemporary literature. Perhaps, of the three, Wells is the greatest, because there is possibly no greater thing than a scientific prophet who is also a brilliant novelist. If Belloc and Shaw are smaller men it is because they deal with smaller matters.

At the present day Chesterton does occupy in contemporary literature a place that no one else does. He is, in a sense, a Dickens of the twentieth century; he is something more, he may even be a prophet. Of course Chesterton has not the enormous following that Dickens had at the height of his powers, but he has that kind of monumental feeling in the twentieth century that belonged to Dickens in the nineteenth: he is typical of this century, being an optimist when ordinary men are pessimistic. As in the nineteenth century Dickens made common men realise their greatness when they themselves felt immeasurably small, so Chesterton makes great men feel small when they are really so.

But in another sense he cannot really be compared to Dickens. Dickens undoubtedly was a delineator of supreme characters. I do not think it can be said that any of the characters of Chesterton would ever be known with the knowledge with which Mr. Pickwick is known. Dickens was not in any sense an essayist; Chesterton is one in every sense. Dickens was a man who really cared very much that all kinds of oppression should be put down; Chesterton, no doubt, cares also, but he rather imagines that things ordinary people quite rightly call welfare work are but forms of slavery. If Dickens hated factories it was because he had hateful experience of them; if Chesterton hates factories it is because he thinks they destroy

family life and the home. I have attempted to suggest that Dickens and Chesterton are alike as regards their being monuments of their respective centuries. I have also suggested that they are extremely unlike. Yet I can think of no writer of the nineteenth century who, in ideal, is so near to Chesterton as Dickens; but that at the same time they are also so far apart is but another indication that to place Chesterton in regard to the past is almost impossible.

One thing that Chesterton is not, is an Eclectic; if he is an original thinker, it is because he can see that though black is not really white there is no particular reason why it should not be grey; if Notting Hill can boast of forty fried fish shops he does not see any reason why it could fail to produce a Napoleon. If a party of Dons are sitting round a table discussing how desirable is the elimination of life, he sees that it is a perfectly good ethic for one of the undergraduates to test the theory by brandishing a loaded pistol at the warden's head. If, as a novelist, he is different to all his contemporaries, it is because he has discovered that the word novel sometimes means something new, sometimes something original, very often something extremely old.

Yet another difficulty for finding an exact niche for Chesterton lies in the fact that he is a bit of everything, and, what is more, these bits are very big and make a large kaleidoscope. He is a theological professor who is so entirely sensible that the public hardly discovers the fact; he does not wear a cap and gown, and quote quite easily from all the Fathers of the ancient Church. He does not apologize for Christianity by reading Christian books. Rather to learn the Christian standpoint he discovers the tenets of Rationalism; he writes a theological philosophy that might be a discussion between Satan and Christ and puts it into a novel; he writes a dissertation on Transubstantiation and puts it into a tale of anarchy that is so untheological that it mentions Leicester Square and lobster mayonnaise; he is a historian who not only writes history but understands it; he does not consider that William conquered

England, but that England conquered William; he says the best way to read history is to read it backwards; he is a historian who does not consider the most important facts are the dates of kings who lived and died.

It has been said that Chesterton is the finest essayist of the day. It would be perhaps fairer to say he is like no living essayist; if he is not a finer essayist than Dean Inge, he is at least as good; he may not be so academic, but he is as learned; if he has not quite the charm of Mr. Lucas he is at least more versatile. His essays sparkle with epigrams, they are full of paradox. He has said that Plato said silly things and yet was the wonder of the ancient world. He can lament that H. G. Wells has come to the awful conclusion that two and two are four, and at the same time be thankful that not even in fairy-land can two and two make five; he can state quite calmly that the weakness of Feminism is that it drives the woman from the freedom of the home to the slavery of the world; he can make priggish clergymen, who accuse him of joking and taking the name of the Lord in vain, bite their words by explaining that to make a joke of anything is not to take it in vain. As an essayist, Chesterton stands apart from his contemporaries. Of older essayists I can think of none who could in any way be said to have a similarity to Chesterton.

One of the most interesting things about Chesterton is his position as a poet. I have said, in an earlier chapter, that he might have been the Poet Laureate. I have ventured to say that if posterity did not place him among great poets it would be because he had given more attention to prose. The particular question of Chesterton as a poet opens up a more general one, which is something in the nature of a problem. Would the great classic poets of the last century have been as great if they had not written so much poetry? Had Tennyson written but two long poems; had Browning never written anything but short lyrics; had Wordsworth been content to write few poems, provided these had been an indication of the best work of these particular poets, would posterity have granted them

immortality? Will Chesterton go down to posterity as a poet on account of his fine achievement in his 'Ballad of the White Horse,' or will people forget him because he has not written more? I am rather afraid this may be so. Posterity, it is true, likes quality, but it likes it better with quantity.

But I feel that I am dealing with what I had said it would be well to avoid—anything to do with the future of Chesterton. What is Chesterton's position as a poet to-day? He is, I think, one of the finest of the day; he has a fine sense of humour in poetry; he has great powers of recasting scenes of long-forgotten centuries; he has a fine musical rhythm; but he has not, I think, pathos. I think it is a pity that he does not write epics on events of the day; he might easily find the Poet Laureate's silence an inspiration; he might write another great poem; it might be better than any more novels.

It is difficult to say whether or not Chesterton is a playwright. His one play was a fine one about a fine subject, but I do not think it had the qualities that would be popular in an ordinary theatre in London. There is a certain suggestion of a problem about it which is a little obscure. We are not sure whether Chesterton is in earnest or joking: it has not probably sufficient action to suit this century, that wishes aeroplanes to dash through the house on the stage, or two or three people to meet with violent deaths in three acts. It is in the nature of a discussion and might be almost anti-Shavian; it would be absurd to attempt to place Chesterton among contemporary dramatic authors, but it is not too much to predict that he might quite easily soon be very near the front rank.

By his critical studies of Browning, Dickens, and Thackeray, Chesterton has proved that there was a great deal more to be said about these classic authors than the critics had seemed to think. Chesterton seldom agreed with those who had written before. What they had considered weaknesses he had considered strength; what he had considered weakness they had considered strength. Possibly no author had been written about more than Dickens, yet there remained for Chesterton

to add much that was vital. No poet had been more misunderstood than Browning; no poet had been more attacked for his grotesque style; no critic has written with the understanding of Browning as has Chesterton. In taking extracts from Thackeray, Chesterton has shown a fine appreciation of that novelist's best work.

It is a difficult thing for a great writer to be a great critic. He is liable to be either condescending or supercilious; he is liable unconsciously to judge all standards by his own; he is likely to be rather intolerant of any opinions but his own; it is easier for a great critic to be a great writer. In the case of Chesterton, because he is a great and original writer he has a brilliant critical acumen that probes deep into the minds of other authors and sees what is stored there in a way that other critics have, perhaps, failed to see, not because they did not choose to look for it, but rather because, almost without knowing it, critics who set out to be critics exclusively are liable to work rather too much by a fixed rule.

It is, I hope, now apparent how difficult it is to say where exactly Chesterton finds a place in literature. Is it as an essayist? Is it as a novelist? Is it as a historian? Is it as a critic? If it is as a novelist, then it is as a writer of peculiar phantasy; if it is as an essayist, it is as a brilliant controversialist; if it is as a historian, it is as a unique critic of history; if it is as a critic, it is as a broad-minded one of not only past great authors but of current events.

I do not know of any writer who is so difficult to place. Wells can quite well be a fine novelist and prophet; Bernard Shaw can easily be called a playwright and a philosopher; Galsworthy is a serious novelist and a playwright who takes the art with proper regard for its powers of social redress; Sir James Barrie is a mystical writer with a message. There are fifty novelists who are interpreters of manners and problems of the twentieth century. But Chesterton is not like any of these. He is not in any sense a specialist; he is really a general practitioner with the hand of a specialist in everything

he touches except divorce. In a word, he is that thing in literature that occurs once or twice in every century—an epic. He is the laughing, genial writer of the twentieth century who, in everything he does, earns the highest of all literary honours—to be unique.

# Chapter Thirteen

## G. K. C. AND G. B. S.

IT would be a very interesting problem to try and discover how it is that Gilbert Keith Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw have come to be known so familiarly as G. K. C. and G. B. S. If any of my readers can suggest a solution of this, I hope they will let me know; because, if I calmly headed this chapter G. K. C. and J. M. B. I do not think that any one would guess that I was attempting to compare Chesterton to James Matthew Barrie unless I told them. It would be really quite amusing to do all comparisons by this initial method; we might find in the *Hibbert Journal* an article on the need of Episcopacy headed H. H. Dunelm and Frank Zanzibar, which would be quite simply the Bishop of Durham and the Bishop of Zanzibar on Episcopacy; or, for a rest, we might turn to the *Daily Herald* and find 'J. R. C. attacks L. G.', which would be quite simply that Mr. Clynes did not see eye to eye with the Premier that a Coalition Government was a national asset.

If we refer to the past, it is not easy to suggest any one who might be known by initials. Charles Dickens was never known as C. D.; Thackeray, when he wrote his 'Essay on the Four Georges' was probably not known as W. M. T. on the Four Georges; but if Chesterton writes a book on America, the Press affirms that there is a new book on America by G. K. C., or we pick up a morning paper and find a large headline on 'G. B. S. on Prisons,' and every one knows who it is. But put a headline, 'Randall on Divorce,' and it is not seen at once that the Archbishop of Canterbury has been addressing the Upper House on a matter of grave ecclesiastical import.

There is a saying about some people being born great, others having that state thrust upon them, others as having achieved it. There is no doubt that Chesterton was born to be great, so no doubt was Shaw, but they went about it in a different way. The public caught hold of the remarkable personality of Chesterton and scarcely a day passed that the Press did not either quote him or caricature him; on the other hand, Shaw caught hold of the public, annoyed its susceptibilities, held it in supreme contempt, raved at it from the stage and platform, and the public, amazed at his cleverness, received him as the rude philosopher who looked a genius, talked like a whirlwind, said that he was greater than Shakespeare, said he was the *Molière* of the twentieth century, and posed until it was expected of him.

But Chesterton does not pose. If he comes to lecture on Cobbett and talks for three-quarters of an hour on how his hat blew off, it is not a pose, it is the natural inconsequence of Chesterton on the platform. If Shaw is invited to a dinner and writes that he does not eat dinner and does not care to see others doing nothing else, he is posing; but, if so, it is because he is expected to do so.

On almost every subject Shaw and Chesterton disagree; yet they are both men who, in some way, attempt to be reformers. Shaw proceeds by satire and contempt; Chesterton proceeds by originality and good nature, except on the question of divorce, which makes him very angry, and, as I have said, uncritical. Shaw chastises the world and is angry; Chesterton laughs, and, in a genial way, asks what is wrong; and, having found out, attempts to put things right. Shaw would rather have a new sort of world with a super-man.

Shaw and Chesterton approach reform from two different ways. Chesterton suggests them by queer novels and paradoxical essays; Shaw puts his ideas into the mouthpieces of those who are known as Shavian characters; he interprets his theories by the Stage, therefore his sermons reach tens of thousands who would not read him if he preached from a

pulpit. Thus, if he wants to show that there are no rules for getting married, he puts the problem into a play and wants an extension of divorce; Chesterton, on the other hand, believes that marriage is Divine and that divorce is but a superstition. If Shaw believed that the home narrowed life, was a domestic monarchy, meant a loss of individuality between husband and wife, Chesterton, far from agreeing to this proposition, takes the opposite view that it is the home which is large and the world which is small and narrowing. Probably neither is quite right. For some people the home is narrowing, for others it is the place that affords the widest scope; for some the world is narrow, for others the world is extremely broad—in fact, so broad that they never are able to get free from its immensity.

With regard to religion, whatever opinions Chesterton may hold—as he is now a Roman Catholic—they are no longer of interest. Shaw, on the other hand, is much too elastic a man to imagine for a moment that religion is a thing that is necessarily bound up with an organization which is mainly political; he is not so credulous as to believe that the spiritual can fall vertically to earth because a man kneels before a bishop and becomes a priest. Rather he had a much better plan. He started by being an atheist, the best possible foundation for subsequent theism. From this he became an Immanist, which is that God is in some way dispersed throughout the earth.

If there is one thing upon which we may say that Shaw and Chesterton are identical, it is in the strange fact that neither of them has, I think, ever described an ordinary lover—the sort of person who is nothing of a biological surprise, the kind of person who woos on a suburban court in Surbiton or Wimbledon and marries in a hideous red brick church to the cheerful accompaniment of confetti and the Wedding March. I do not think either of them can really enter into the ordinary emotions of life. They could neither of them write, I fancy, a really typical novel—that is, a tale about the folks who do the

conventional things. Chesterton always sees everything upside down. If the man on Notting Hill sees it as a bustling area, Chesterton sees it as a place upon which a Napoleon might fall. Shaw, on the other hand, could not write of ordinary things because he is usually contemptuous of them. If Chesterton thinks education is a failure it is because the conventional method irritates him; Shaw considers that education does not educate a man, it 'merely moulds him.'

I am not sure that Mr. Skimpole, in his brilliant study of Bernard Shaw, is quite correct when he says 'the whole case against Chesterton, of course, is that he is a Romantic.' Why is it a something against him that he chooses to be an idealist? Because, says Mr. Skimpole, 'he does not seem to have grasped the fact that the most important difference between the Real and the Ideal aspects of anything is that while the Ideal is permanent and unchangeable as an angel, the Real requires an everlasting circle of changes.' I am rather afraid Mr. Skimpole is talking through a certain covering that adorns his head. Cannot he see that very often the ideal is nothing less than the real? It is no case against Chesterton that he is a Romantic so long as the fact is duly recognized. If he considers certain institutions are permanent which may be said to be ideal (for instance, that marriage is a sacrament), he is just as likely to be as right as is Mr. Shaw when he contends that marriage must be made to fit the times, even if it be granted it is a Divine thing.

If Shaw is unable to see that most earthly things have a heavenly meaning, as Chesterton does, it is so much the worse for Shaw and so much the better for Chesterton. If Chesterton is a dangerous Romantic who likes Fairyland, at least Shaw is a dangerous eugenist who wants a super-man, and I am not sure that the fairies of Chesterton are not more useful than the ethics of Shaw; there is no doubt that they are less grown up. If Shaw is a philosopher, he is not one of this Universe; he is of another that shall be entirely sub-Shavian. If Chesterton is a

philosopher, it is because he can see this universe better upside down than Shaw understands it the right way up.

In fact, the difference between Shaw and Chesterton may, I think, be something like this. They are, as I have said, both reformers, but Chesterton wishes to keep man as he is essentially, and gradually make him something better. Shaw wants to have done with man and produce a super-man. In this way Shaw admits the failure of man to rise above his environment. Chesterton not only thinks he is able to, but tries to prove it in his writings. Thus, if a man is an atheist he can show that he is in time capable of becoming a good theist, but Shaw if he allows some of his characters to be in hell, gets them out of it by attempting to make them strive for the super-man. For Chesterton, Man is the Super-Man; for Shaw, the Super-Man is not Man at all.

In fact, this no doubt is the reason that Shaw is really a pessimist and Chesterton an optimist.

There is, I think, little doubt that Chesterton is a far more important man than Shaw. He has the facility for getting hold of the things that matter; he is never ill-natured; he does not make fun of other people. Much as the writer admires the wit and brilliancy of Shaw, he cannot help feeling that Shaw is a rather cynical personality; Shaw loves to laugh at people, he is inclined to make fun of the martyrs. They were possibly quite mistaken in their enthusiasm, but at least they were consistent. I do not feel convinced that Shaw would stand in the middle of Piccadilly Circus and keep his ideals if he knew that it would involve being eaten by lions that came up Regent Street, as the martyrs faced them centuries ago in Rome, but I have little doubt that Chesterton would remain in Piccadilly Circus if he knew that he would be eaten unless he denied that marriage was a Divine institution.

In a word, Shaw bases his Philosophy and Plays on a contempt for all existing institutions. Chesterton bases his Writings and Philosophy on genial good nature and a respect

for the things that are important. Therefore I think that Shaw has not made such a permanent contribution to thought as Chesterton certainly has; even if it is only in showing that the Christian religion is reasonable.

## *Chapter Fourteen*

### CONCLUSION

**T**HREE was a time in history when the ancient world searched in vain for the truth. It produced men of the type of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates; they were great philosophers who looked at the world in which they lived and asked what it meant. Was it material? Was it spiritual? Was it temporary? Was it eternal? Men were dissatisfied. And about that time a greater Philosopher came in the wake of a star, and men called Him Christ.

It is the twentieth century, and the Man the ancient world called Christ founded the religion which His followers were to take to the ends of the earth. Yet men are still dissatisfied; philosophers look out of their high-walled windows and watch the modern world, which goes on; men die and are forgotten; creeds spring up for a day and pass; writers produce books, and in their turn pass away.

Of this century Chesterton is one of the great thinkers. It is, I think, a mistake not to take him seriously. If he is phantastic, there is a meaning behind his phantasy; if he laughs, the world need not think that he is frivolous. He is a prophet, and he has honour in his own country.

Chesterton is still a young man; he is young in soul and body. Like Peter Pan he does not grow up, yet he is a famous man; he has written great books, he has written fine poems, he has written brilliant essays, but he has never written a book with an appeal to an unthinking public that reads to kill thought. I wonder whether Chesterton would write a 'Philosophy for the Unthinking Man'? I think he is the one

man of the day who could do it, and I think it might be his greatest book.

I have attempted in this book to draw a picture of the works of Chesterton. They are not easy to deal with; they may mean many things. I have not attempted to forecast the future of Chesterton, strong as the temptation has been, but I have endeavoured to place before those who know Chesterton what it is they admire in him; and for those who only know him as a name, I hope that this book may induce them to read the most arresting writer of the day, who is known in every country as the Master of Paradox, which is to say that he is the Master of the Temple of Understanding.

*THE END*









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